

REPORT TO G.C. MAY 2007

A huge amount has happened since the last GC at the end of February and I hardly know where to begin. The Elections on 3 May were important for us here in Pendle and it was great news that we managed to win in Bradley. There were, however, some disappointments. But the only way is up!

The Lib/Dems are in a very strong position in Pendle and managed to see off some former colleagues of theirs standing as Independents. Clearly, we need to focus relentlessly on the Lib/Dems and their record, over the coming 12 months. I want to establish a local "quotes bank" highlighting the inappropriate or down right nasty things they say about people. And we cannot allow them to continually claim credit for policies and initiatives (and money) from the Labour Government.

I am hopeful that the Party will get a bounce when Gordon Brown takes over from Tony Blair at the end of next month. He has promised a blizzard of attractive and headline grabbing proposals. We wait to see!

As you will know, I nominated John McDonnell to get a contest which I thought would be healthy for the party and the country. It would have forced the contenders to clarify their positions and spell out their policies on the major issues of the day. It was always a long shot to get sufficient support for McDonnell, who chairs the Campaign Group of Labour MPs. In the event, it proved impossible to get enough support to even get on the ballot paper.

There are six candidates running for Deputy Leader and I have nominated Jon Cruddas from Barking in Dagenham. All six have got onto the ballot paper though Cruddas is probably regarded as an outsider, never having been appointed by Blair to a Ministerial job. I am backing him because he is prepared to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy. He talks about the Labour Party having been hollowed out over the last ten years and the pressing need to rebuild it. I think this has some resonance given the national results on 3 May. We lost 500 councillors nationwide (down 3500 since 1997) and, unbelievably, have an SNP First Minister in Scotland and a Labour minority administration in Wales. Overall, we took 27% of the vote. It follows there is much to be done.

At Westminster life continues with a flurry of policy pronouncements. We have had a new Energy White Paper following the judgement a few months ago by the High Court that the consultation on the previous one was flawed. Within the White Paper, which promotes renewables, bio-mass and so on, there is another consultation on nuclear energy! The Government is likely to press ahead with a new generation of nuclear power stations but does not want to put a procedural foot wrong.

We also had the new Planning White Paper which proposes to "streamline" the system where major projects can get bogged down for years in never ending enquiries. The Government is proposing an independent planning commission, bringing together lawyers, environmentalists and other interested groups, but we wait to see the small print. I don't now how the commission is going to be appointed and if it is to have the final say on crucially important matters such as the siting of nuclear power stations then this point is not a trivial one.

consultation, reward people
who reduce waste

chip in bin

50%
recycling
by 2020
27% now

We also had the publication of the Government's new Waste Strategy for England – topical given the current controversy over fortnightly rubbish collections. As a country we generate about 100,000,000 tons of waste every year and most of it goes into landfill. The Government strategy is to promote recycling, but also to prevent waste being generated in the first place. We also want to see more energy from waste and greater attention given to over elaborate packaging.

As a back-drop to these announcements we have had a continuing series of bad news stories from the Department of Health. It seems as if the beleaguered Health Secretary, Patricia Hewitt, has been hauled before the Commons every second week to explain the latest crisis or catastrophe. We seem to have alienated the Junior Hospital Doctors (whose personal details were put on the internet by mistake) the Nurses (up in arms over their staged pay rise) the GPs (zero pay rise) and the Consultants (who are always moaning about something or other). After Brown takes over few believe Patricia Hewitt will remain in the job.

redundances
at
East Lancashire
Hospitals

We have also had simmering tensions between the judges and the Government over the creation of the new Ministry of Justice. I have to say I did find it astonishing that the Lord Chief Justice read about the new Ministry of Justice from the pages of the Sunday Telegraph!

Rounding off a period of uncertainty, we have had the debacle of the Home Information Packs. We had an Opposition Day debate last week where Ministers bravely fought off criticism (I am in principal very much in favour of HIPs though I regret they were watered down last year to remove home condition surveys). But this week the Government announced that the implementation of HIPs was to be delayed and that only four bedroom houses would require a HIPs!

93%

In policy terms there are great uncertainties with the change in Party Leader. Tony Blair spent 14 years leading the Labour Party and has, to a large extent, fashioned it in his own image. Over the past few months he has been chairing policy reviews to come up with proposals for the longer term. Whether Gordon Brown picks them up and runs with them is an altogether different matter.

future
Shirley

The Government has been working on an "information sharing" agenda. Where data on individuals is made available across Government and the public services. This is likely to be very controversial as people may feel their privacy can be compromised. In fact a senior police officer has raised concerns about the extent of the surveillance society.

I believe the Party can renew itself in power but not by following a "steady as she goes" agenda. If this happens people will see the Brown Premiership as simply a continuation of Blair's rather than a break and a fresh start. A decision on Iraq is, I think, a necessary precondition for any recovery in the polls as well as a focus on people's real priorities. The Chancellor has already identified housing and the NHS and education. I am sure the details will follow in due course.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
25.5.07.

See
BDA
calling for
NHS
consultation

REPORT TO GC MEMBERS - March 2007

March was a tumultuous month at Westminster but for all of us in the Pendle Labour Party everything was overshadowed by the death of Bryan Akrigg, our CLP President. Bryan had been in ill health for some time but his death, at the age of 58, still came as a terrible shock to all of us.

Huge numbers of people turned up at Burnley Crematorium to pay their respects and to celebrate Bryan's life. The place was packed to the rafters with people standing and squashed together. Bryan's son in law and Robert Allen spoke movingly and with a light humour as they painted a picture of the man they both knew. We shall all miss Bryan and we think about Marilyn and the rest of the family.

At Westminster, a huge amount has been happening. At the start of the month we had the final stages of the Offender Management Bill which will radically reshape probation services, giving a much bigger role to the private and voluntary sectors. Like so many Labour MPs I am very uncomfortable at the direction of travel.

We also had an historic vote on the future of the House of Lords though it was merely indicative. The Commons voted by a very healthy margin for a wholly elected second chamber. This has always been my position and, finally, I felt vindicated. However, the Lords promptly voted for an appointed House! The stalemate can only be broken by having an explicit commitment to reform in the next manifesto. Significantly, the Prime Minister changed his position, voting for one of the failed options (the 50% elected, 50% nominated House). His previous position was for an all appointed Lords.

In mid March we had the long awaited debate on Trident. The Speaker called me to speak very late on in the debate and I only had a few minutes to make my points. I said there was no legal basis to assume we could upgrade our nuclear weapons and not go against our commitments in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. I condemned the fact that the Attorney's advice on this remained confidential within Government. I also made the point that the Labour Party had been treated disgracefully and had been given no opportunity to express its view. 95 Labour MPs voted against the Government (the biggest so called "rebellion" since the vote on the Iraq war) and the motion got through only with Conservative support.

As a footnote, I had the opportunity to share a platform with Andrew Stephenson, the Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, at a meeting on Trident for students at Silverman Hall. It was surreal having the Conservative defend the Government's position. But there we go. This is part of Blair's legacy.

On the NHS, the private sector CATS reforms go ahead despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of people responding to the Lancashire and Cumbria SHA consultation said they didn't want the private sector involved. The role of the private sector, as we all know, was specifically outside the scope of the consultation having already been decided by central Government.

We also had a controversial vote on gambling and whether we should allow a super casino to be located in Manchester or Blackpool. I voted against the Order (along with 17 other Labour MPs) but it took the Lords (by a majority of three) to kick the proposals into touch. I justify my action by pointing to my vote in 2004 against the Gambling Bill - the parent legislation that gave rise to the super casino Order. These super casinos have 1200 slot machines offering unlimited jackpots and there is no membership requirement. I tend to agree with the Archbishop of Canterbury who believes we shouldn't rely on this kind of gambling to regenerate the poorest, run down areas of our towns and cities.

Closer to home, we had news that the plans to create a new unitary authority out of Pendle and Burnley had failed. The Government had decided that Lancashire without Burnley and Pendle would not be viable. I agree. But I also believe much more needs to be done to make the two tier system more responsive.

The proposed reform of local government has the potential to do the Government great damage. On the 16 proposed reorganisations that are to be allowed through to the next stage, no fewer than 10 are based on Counties. One of these is North Yorkshire. So Craven District Council could go up in a puff of smoke along with Harrogate and all the others in that vast County. I shall watch with interest.

We also had the Budget. Probably the last from Gordon Brown and it got a mixed reception once the initial euphoria over the 2p tax cut had dissipated. The Conservatives and Lib Dems seized on the fact that some low income people would lose out in the drive to simplify the tax system.

Away from the Budget, the big event in the closing days of March was the future of the Home Office, now to be split in two with a new Ministry of Justice emerging. The former Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, condemned the decision as "irresponsible". My own view is that major structural reorganizations of Government should be scrutinized beforehand by Parliament. We have had four reincarnations of the Department of Transport since 1997. And the Office of Deputy Prime Minister has become the Deputy Prime Minister's Office! The DTI became the Department of Energy, Productivity and Industry before reverting to the DTI again after 24 hours!

Campaigning is now well under way for the local elections in England and for the important elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. The results, whatever they may be, will change the dynamic of politics at Westminster. The Prime Minister is expected to announce his resignation shortly afterwards and campaigning for the leadership and deputy leadership of the Party will then formally begin. I hope there is a contest for Leader. It would help renew the Party and define the new Leader. The Lib Dems survived a leadership contest after Kennedy stood down and Cameron's election has boosted the Conservatives' fortunes. Into this mix in April, I expect an announcement from the Met Police on the so called "cash for honours" allegations. Stormy times ahead.

Gordon Prentice MP 2 April 2007

REPORT TO AGM FEBRUARY 2007

It has been a difficult few weeks for the Government with the High Court quashing Ministerial decisions on some key policy issues. On Wednesday, the High Court ruled that thousands of people who had lost their occupational pensions when their employers' schemes went belly up had been misled by leaflets produced by the Department of Work and Pensions which suggested that these schemes were sound. The judge agreed with the Parliamentary Ombudsman (who reports to my Select Committee) and the Government has said it will think again.

Again, in the High Court, Mr. Justice Sullivan found in favour of Greenpeace when he ruled that the consultation on civil nuclear power had been flawed. The Prime Minister promptly said that the Government was committed to nuclear power anyway, hinting that the ruling would make no practical difference. The DTI is now considering how best to re-consult. As you know, the previous Energy White Paper did not go down the nuclear road but recommended much greater emphasis on renewables and energy saving. The latest White Paper took a straight pro-nuclear line.

At Westminster, Jack Straw has been busily cobbling together proposals for Lords Reform. His plan to have 50% nominated and 50% elected is unlikely to fly. He also wants an amazingly lengthy 15 year term. I don't think there is a consensus for this package and he has already been forced to backtrack on his proposal to have MPs voting preferentially on a ballot paper on the various options – from fully elected to fully appointed to the abolition of the House and much else in between. We are promised a vote on this shortly.

We also have the Offender Management Bill returning to the Commons Chamber from the Committee Corridor and this is likely to prove very controversial. It proposes bringing in the private sector to do much of the work currently carried out by the Probation Service. As you know, in January I had an opportunity to speak to the local Probation people in Nelson and they voiced their concerns.

Next month we are likely to see the police report on the so called cash for honours business. The issue has been dragging on for a year and I take the view that the police really ought to put up or shut up. It cannot be allowed to drag on indefinitely. I have no idea whether charges will be brought, but if they are not, then the police and the CPS will have some explaining to do.

Elsewhere, the news has been about the Downing Street e-petition, where over one and a half million people emailed the Prime Minister to tell him they were unhappy with the prospect of congestion charges. This has provoked quite a lot of comment on "people power". Indeed, today's front page in the Independent lists a whole series of areas where consumers are joining forces on the internet to take on the State and big business. They mention the banks, the utilities, air travel, packaging, football tickets, supermarkets and post offices. I was left wondering how long it would be before political parties are forced to take their members' views into account on major policy issues.

The future of Trident would have been an excellent example of an issue where the Party could have been formally consulted. Instead, there is no consultation, only a vote in Parliament where MPs are expected to sense the mood of their constituents.

When people here in Pendle wake up to the fact that there is a possibility of merging with Burnley, they are likely to be (a) deliriously happy, (b) upset or (c) completely indifferent. Whichever it is, I think we ought to ask them. If the Government decides to provisionally accept this merger I think it would be seriously bad politics to wave it through without giving people the opportunity to comment.

The Leadership race is getting more crowded than ever. Yesterday, Michael Meacher threw his hat into the ring to challenge Gordon Brown and John McDonnell for the Leadership. I think Michael's chances must be considered remote. On the Deputy Leadership, the Party Chair, Hazel Blears, has joined the pack which so far includes Harriet Harman, Peter Hain, Alan Johnson, Hilary Benn and Jon Cruddas

I think one of the emerging themes in the contest will be this one of reconnecting with people and with the Government reconnecting with the Party. As she launched her bid, Hazel Blears admitted that the Party felt disengaged.

This Government will, I am sure, be remembered for its endless consultations and we are in the middle of an important one – the future of the local NHS. The Government want to bring in the private sector in a very big way, establishing Clinical Assessment, Treatment and Support Clinics (CATS) in eight locations across Lancashire and Cumbria. The preferred private sector bidder is the South African company, Netcare. Unfortunately, the contract between the Department of Health and Netcare is commercially confidential and when I pressed the Prime Minister on this at PMQs this week he confirmed this was the case.

The consultation is on the so called second wave of private sector treatment centres. The first wave, which was launched in 2002 didn't fully live up to expectations according to the Commons Health Select Committee. But we do know that the private sector was paid 11.2% above the NHS equivalent cost for clinical procedures. This is to boost the capacity of the private sector. I call it force feeding the private sector.

This consultation raises more questions than it answers and it is very tightly circumscribed. It is not possible, for example, to challenge the enhanced role of the private sector in delivering NHS services. That has already been decided by the centre. Sounds familiar?

GORDON PRENTICE MP
23.2.2007

REPORT TO G.C. 26th JANUARY 2007

It seems as if a huge amount has happened since the last GC in November. But before I get on to that, I want to thank everyone for their support in my re-selection. You've done the right thing!

In early December I was in Azerbaijan for a conference on the Central Asian Republics. It was a real eye opener for me. The country - or rather the road from the airport into the main town, Baku - is described as the most polluted part of the planet. And in town you cannot get away from the smell of petrol. Western Europe will increasingly rely on places like Azerbaijan for energy and it certainly persuaded me that we need to redouble our efforts to generate power from clean, home grown sources. Amazingly, I bumped into Mark Thatcher on the bus to the VIP suite at the airport! I asked him what he was doing there, but he didn't give anything away.

Here, the Government is going through another very difficult patch. It seems to be one thing after another and the wheels seem to be coming off the wagon. Candidates for the Deputy Leadership are now openly setting out their stalls and the NEC on Tuesday will, for the first time, discuss the timetable for the Leadership elections.

On 4 December, when the Government announced its proposal to spend £20,000,000,000 on replacing and upgrading the Trident nuclear weapons system, I wrote to the General Secretary of the Party, Peter Watt, asking the NEC to consult formally with the Party at CLP level. I said the National Policy Forum (which is due to meet next month) should not substitute for the consultation I had in mind. I wrote on behalf of 26 Labour MPs but the number has since doubled. There is no reason whatsoever why a decision on Trident cannot be delayed until the Annual Conference.

We have also had a relentless focus on Ministers. First there was the whole business about Ruth Kelly's son and her decision to send him to an Oxfordshire boarding school. Then we had the Party Chair, Hazel Blears, on the picket line protesting against the closure of maternity facilities at her local hospital. We now know that at least eleven Ministers have campaigned for the retention of NHS facilities which are threatened in their own constituencies. And as if that wasn't enough, we have had four arrests so far in the so called Cash for Peerages drama. Ruth Turner, the PM's gatekeeper, had to endure the police turning up at her home at 6.30am.

We will shortly receive another White Paper on Lords Reform - this one penned by Jack Straw. He will propose the end of the remaining hereditaries (about 90 of them) and a hybrid Upper Chamber, some elected, some appointed. The exact proportions will be determined by a vote in the Commons. I think he is also proposing a single twelve year term which, in my view, is far too long.

A looming issue on the horizon is the future of the NHS. We are in a transition period where market mechanisms are being introduced. Major specialisms here in Lancashire could go to the South African company, Netcare. And there have been rumblings of discontent, not just from UNISON but from within the medical professions. Consultants in Blackburn fear that Netcare will not simply deal with work that the NHS is too busy to handle, but will take it away from the NHS.

This is happening as part of a drive to ensure that all public services deliver best value for money. In the guise of "contestability" public services are being tested in the market. We shall shortly be debating the Offender Management Bill which proposes a big shake-up of the Probation Service, perhaps with people like Securicor or Group 4 carrying out functions currently delivered by the Probation people.

In the same way, the Government is very interested in seeing whether the third sector (or voluntary, not for profit sector) can deliver services provided by the State. An example here is Jobcentre Plus where, for example, help to get people with disabilities into work could be contracted out to organisations with expertise in that area.

Locally, the big story is undoubtedly the proposed new local authority, absorbing Pendle and Burnley. In the past people have been consulted on local government reorganisations and, indeed, we were all invited to comment on proposals last year to create new Parishes. It would be a big mistake for this to be waved through without involving the public. It is a tight timetable, but, perhaps the Council could organise a local referendum?

We all know that Lancashire County Council gets some pretty bad press coverage. We have had stories about school bus cut-backs and the changes to the Fire Service in West Craven. And none of us can forget the debacle over the care homes. But a merger with Burnley would bring its own challenges.

Since the last GC I have had an Adjournment Debate on the Karims and also, following this, a letter from the Minister, Liam Byrne, making it clear he is not prepared to change his mind. Everything rides now on the Judicial Review brought by the Karims' solicitor. For this to succeed they would have to demonstrate that the Minister acted irrationally and did not follow the Law in all its respects.

Last week I had a meeting with Max Steinberg and David Taylor of Elevate and had an opportunity to review the Pendle programme. I was shocked to learn that of the £8 million Pendle allocation, over £5 million had to be spent by 31 March, the end of the financial year. The council's Chief Executive has since informed me that the council has "plans in place to ensure the appropriate allocations are spent by the 31 March 2007." I hope so, because unspent monies will switch to Blackburn I think - although we will get the money back later.

Today I visited St. Joseph's RC Primary School in Barnoldswick where I fielded questions for half an hour from members of the School Council!

Elsewhere, the former BNP activist and failed Pendle Council candidate, Robert Cottage, whose home was full of chemicals, a rocket launcher and other nasty stuff, goes to trial on 10 February. It will give us a chance to shine a torch onto the dark under belly of the BNP.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
26.1.07

Report to Pendle GC – Friday 24 November 2006

I am writing this on Monday 20 November just as the new Parliamentary year begins. The Queen's Speech, which is being debated as I write this, sets out over twenty Bills which will be introduced this session.

The one that grabs the headlines is the Climate Change Bill which sets a target of cutting carbon emissions by 60% by 2050. A Pensions Bill, linking the state pension with increases in earnings, is long overdue. It is a policy I have supported over the years – when this view was regarded as heresy by the Leadership.

We can also expect the usual raft of Home Office measures on crime and the criminal justice system. The problem is when we hype this up, people believe crime is soaring and way out of control when, in fact, the chances of being a victim of crime is now the lowest in 25 years. A Bill allow trial without jury in complex fraud cases.

A new Mental Health Bill is promised to address concerns about those with severe personality disorders who might pose a threat to public safety.

The Government also plans to reshape the probation or "offender management" service, opening it up to the private and voluntary sectors. This is likely to be controversial. I am meeting local probation people in Pendle shortly. The Prime Minister wants Parliament to revisit the whole question of detention without charge for up to 90 days. The Attorney General is not persuaded. And, on the facts so far in the public domain, neither am I. Watch this space.

We shall also have Bills on Further Education and Training which will "streamline and re-structure" the Learning and Skills Councils (which we set up). FE institutions will be able to award their own foundation degrees.

A Child Support Bill will restructure this ever controversial and ever underperforming Agency. A Digital Switchover Bill will allow data swapping between organisations and agencies with the BBC to ensure no-one is left behind when we switch off the analogue signal (in 2009 in the North West).

A Concessionary Fares Bill will implement the pledge already given to ensure that everyone over 60 and disabled people will get free off-peak travel on all local buses anywhere in England from April 2008.

We shall also get a Local Government Bill to allow restructuring where wanted and also permit different forms of civic governance.

I am very much in favour of the proposal for independent statistics with the creation of an independent board, outside the control of Ministers.

We can also expect some proposals on the reform of the House of Lords though Jack Straw's proposed 50% elected 50% nominated falls short, in my view, of what is required. I'd go for 80:20 although my preference, as you know, is for a small wholly elected upper chamber.

It was unfortunate I missed the Silverman lecture with Hazel Blears but, by all accounts, it went well. I was in the States with my Select Committee in the run up to the mid term Congressional elections. Until you've been to the US at election time, you've never seen dirty politics. It is jaw dropping.

My Select Committee has, of course, been looking at the honours system (our first report was published a couple of years ago) and we reluctantly agreed to put our follow up Inquiry on hold to allow the police to carry out their own investigations into the so called "cash for honours" affair. It is now coming to the boil. Whatever happens, the system of patronage which puts people into the legislature - because they've got money or know the right people - has got to change. It is totally corrupt.

Here in Pendle, one of the big stories of the month was the inexplicable decision of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Blackburn with Darwen and LCC to wave through the Burnley General downgrading. A damaging and truly astonishing decision given the alternative option of bringing in an independent panel of clinicians was dangling there before their eyes.

I have written to Patricia Hewitt asking her to call in the matter anyway on the grounds that important petitions objecting to the proposal were not referred by the hospital trust or PCT to Salford University which was commissioned to validate the consultation procedures.

Elsewhere, the battle for the fire service continues. I have formally objected to the proposal to cut cover in parts of the constituency.

Everyone will know of the Karim family who are fighting deportation back to Pakistan. They fear persecution as Christians. I have an adjournment debate in the Commons next Monday (27th) where I will raise the case.

I visited West Street School in Colne recently where they have been celebrating the school's centenary. The school was founded in the same year as Mt Kellogg invented his cornflakes. So there.

I shall update the General Committee on Friday.

Gordon Prentice MP
Monday 20 November 2006

REPORT TO GC NOVEMBER 2006

This is an update to my Report which was mailed to GC Members on Monday 20 November.

The week at Westminster has been dominated by debates on the Queen's Speech. And on Thursday we had a decision on Britain's strategic nuclear "deterrent". The Cabinet has decided to back the retention of our nuclear weapons capability and will publish a White Paper setting out the options, but giving the Government's decision on the one it prefers.

There will then be a 3 month consultation exercise after which we shall have a Parliamentary Debate and a vote on the Government's pre-announced decision, which all Labour MPs will be expected to support on a whipped vote. I shall be voting against the Government's position.

It is not even clear whether the National Policy Forum will be invited to consider the matter or if any systematic canvassing of Party views will be sought. It is, in my view, a totally meaningless consultation with the Government's position having been settled even before the consultation takes place.

This week, we heard from General Sir Patrick Cordingley, the Commander of the Desert Rats in the first Gulf War in 1991 saying he thought our nuclear weapons should go. And, the day before, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales said the same thing.

On Monday, the Debate on the Queen's Speech ends and there is likely to be a separate vote on Iraq - calling on the Government to set out its position and its strategy so that it can be debated in the Commons. The situation in Iraq is spinning out of control with massacres and carnage a daily reality.

Locally, two issues continue to dominate. The first concerns the Fire Service. I met the Lancashire Fire Chief, Peter Holland, and the Chair of the Fire Authority, Bob Wilkinson, at Westminster yesterday. They were down in London for a meeting about the Kashmir earthquake and the contribution made by Britain's emergency services. I learned that Lancashire is to donate 2 fire engines to Pakistan. This is very laudable but, unfortunately, comes at a time when three fire engines are to be axed in the County. The original proposal was for nine to go, but the Fire Chiefs had a rethink and settled on three.

Colne's fire engine has been reprieved, but one of the two in Barnoldswick is to go. The plans for a new fire station in Salterforth or Kelbrook have been dropped and the two existing stations in Barnoldswick and Earby will be kept. The saving from losing the Barnoldswick fire engine is £80,000 pa, in a Fire Authority Budget of £56 million.



East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust
Patient & Public Involvement Forum

14th November 2006

Dear Mr Prentice

Re: Meeting Patients Needs Consultation – Decision of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Lancashire County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council on 7th November 2006

On behalf of the Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) Forum for the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, I am writing to express my dismay and utter astonishment at both the decision reached and the way in which the above meeting was conducted.

As you are aware, at a meeting of the same committee held on the 12th October 2006, the decision as to whether to refer the adoption of Service Model A by the Trust to the Secretary of State was deferred. The reason being that members of the Committee were felt unable to digest all the information presented to them and to make an informed decision.

The Trust was subsequently invited to submit further details on the proposals at the meeting on the 7th November. At this meeting, the Trust was still unable to give firm or further details on their proposals. Very little, if any, new information was given. What we heard was a rehash of the presentations given throughout the consultation period. Whilst the forum is not against change, it is against imposing such substantial changes to the way in which health services are delivered in East Lancashire, based purely on goodwill and without firm details and plans being in place.

As the official body charged with ensuring local health services meet the demands of the local population, and with statutory powers to refer to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, we do not feel the views put forward by the Forum, which reflect those of the local population, have been listened to and taken into account.

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust Patient & Public Involvement Forum
C/o 2nd Floor, The Globe Centre, St James Square, Accrington BB5 0RE

Tel: 01254 300469

Fax: 01254 399741

Email: health@lancashire-ep.org.uk

REPORT TO G.C. 27 OCTOBER 2006

It has been a very busy month at Westminster with lots of important issues coming to the boil. The most important, perhaps, are the plans for the NHS. It is proposed that 60 out of 208 district general hospitals in England will find their blue light A&E Department downgraded. So we are not alone. On Thursday 12 October I went to Blackburn Town Hall to speak to the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, urging them to refer the A&E issue to Patricia Hewitt who would, hopefully, ask the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (a body of clinicians from outside the area) to look at the proposals afresh. The Deputy Chief Whip, Tommy McAvoy, told me on Thursday morning that I had to stay at Westminster and support Government business. I told him I had more important business in Blackburn and left. Kitty Ussher was there too, having got off the Whip on the grounds that I would be going to Blackburn anyway!

Still on health, we have the prospect of the private sector coming into Lancashire in a very big way. A contract is due to be signed with Netcare, a South African company, to provide general surgery, ear nose and throat, trauma, orthopaedics, rheumatology and possibly urology and gynaecology. The Government is very keen to bring in the private sector, who get paid more than the NHS for carrying out exactly the same operations. In the first wave of Independent Sector Treatment Centres the so called uplift over the "NHS reference rate" was 11.5% I am not sure how much more they will be getting in this, the second wave. We are told that in the long term, once the private sector is properly embedded, it will get paid the same as the NHS. There are big issues about staffing (where the doctors and nurses are coming from and their terms and conditions) and where the ISTCs are going to be located. In NHS property or elsewhere. I had an opportunity to talk about these issues with David Peat and the new Chair of the PCT, Kath Reade earlier today.

I also touched on NHS purchasing policy with BSN Medical in mind. It was a shock to learn that the company would be shifting production to the Far East with the loss of about 150 jobs. I met their Global Operations Manager, Darrell Jenkins, last Friday and he explained the background to the decision. BSN has been sold to a venture capital company who are prepared to move production round the globe to maximise their profits. He also told me that the NHS bought their bandages on the internet! I sense there is an air of resignation about it all. Certainly, when I spoke to the T & G's Peter Reid, I got the impression that it was half expected. Fifty or sixty jobs will stay at Brierfield or in the area.

The other big issue to grab the headlines was Jack Straw's comment about veiled Muslim women. He had, in fact, told me a couple of years ago that he didn't see women who were fully veiled but referred them to his Secretary. I do not get many fully veiled women at my surgeries in Pendle. But when this happens I do not ask them to lift the veil. For me, the veil is not necessarily a sign of piety, but an indication that the woman is not in employment. Getting people together in the world of work is critically important in creating an understanding of different cultures and it disturbs me that here in Pendle only 27% of Muslim women of working age are in work compared with 73% of white women.

Next week, the Education and Inspections Bill comes back to the Commons from the Lords and the controversial proposal to make faith schools enrol 25% of their intake from children

Alan

54

of a different religion or none, has been dropped. It was clearly unworkable in practice. However, the issue of diversity and cohesion is not going to go away with so many new faith schools in the pipeline.

Two other former Cabinet Ministers have also been making the news but for different reasons. Clare Short has now decided to sit as an Independent Labour MP, having resigned the Labour Whip. She feels very bitter and, I believe, betrayed by the way in which the Prime Minister persuaded her to stay on after the invasion of Iraq. She will not forgive him. I think she has made a big mistake. She would have had far more leverage if she had stayed within the PLP. David Blunkett has also been speaking out, telling all and sundry about his views of fellow Cabinet Ministers and making huge sums of money from the Daily Mail in the process. This is a terrible misjudgment and he still harbours the fantasy of returning to the Front Bench. He probably has less chance than even Charles Clarke!

Yesterday we had the publication of the Local Government White Paper which got a strangely muted reception. Perhaps because the question of local government finance is to be the subject of a separate report in December. As it is, the Government is proposing more powers for local authorities, who may apply for unitary status if that is their wish. There are some intriguing proposals such as the one to give councillors small budgets to tackle local issues. The process for creating parishes will also be devolved to councils. Perhaps, most importantly, all executive powers of local authorities will be invested in the leader of the council and there are three choices of leadership model of offer: a directly elected mayor, a directly elected executive or a leader elected by his or her fellow councillors with a three or four year mandate. Councils will also be able to move to whole council elections and single member wards if they wish. The Bill will be in the Queen's Speech.

We also had an important statement on the disposal of nuclear waste. It is proposed that high level radioactive waste (there is enough of it to fill the Albert Hall) will be stored in vaults deep underground. Who will want this stuff goodness knows, but there will be bribes.

Locally, things have been happening. We have a consultation until 15 November on the reconfiguration of the Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service. And we have had also had the former BNP council candidate up in court for the possession of chemicals, a rocket launcher and a biological warfare suit. Not too many votes in that! We have also seen Liberal Democrat vote riggers in Burnley being convicted, with the sentence due to be passed next month. I told the Lord Chancellor at this week's PLP meeting that I want to see them jailed - for a long time.

After the success of the SELRAP Conference earlier this month the campaign to restore the Colne/Skipton railway line has been re-energised. Only today, I told the Transport Minister I welcomed the community rail designation of the Preston to Colne line.

The Conservatives have selected "A list" Andrew Stephenson as their Candidate. 52% of A listers were privately educated. You should also know that Jane Ellison has popped up in Wandsworth, standing against my colleague, Martin Linton. I have sent Martin the photographs of Ms. Ellison at the fox hunting meet. Red coats and all.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
27.1006

*Election Administration
Act*

*Stephen
Edwards
- stayed
9/1
whisper*

*Local
govt.
white
paper*

Report to Pendle General Committee: 29 September 2006

It has been a momentous week in a momentous month. I was on holiday in Canada earlier this month when news of the “coup” appeared on the BBC internet site. Tom Watson, the junior defence minister, had resigned and disaffected PPSs had quit. Sion Simon and Chris Bryant, both never previously slow to support the Prime Minister, called on him to go. These were jaw dropping developments.

On the other side of the Atlantic my mobile phone was red hot as the press looked for comments. I did not return the calls. However, it has been plain as a pikestaff for months that disaffection with the Prime Minister’s leadership was reaching boiling point. The shock was to discover some of his most loyal supporters turning on him.

The PM’s response was to say he would stand down before the next Party Conference and this was enough to ensure his survival. Previously he had promised merely to leave his successor “ample time” to settle in before the next General Election.

This, then, was the background to this week’s Manchester Conference. Blair was going and the leadership contenders were sniffing the wind. I was asked by Paddy Tipping who is close to Jack Straw if I would support Jack as Deputy Leader. Others have spoken in confidence to see what kind of support they can muster.

A candidate must be nominated by at least 44 Labour MPs to get on the ballot paper. That is quite a hurdle to get over.

Gordon Brown seemed understandably tense when he spoke on Monday. On Tuesday, by common consent, Blair delivered the speech of his life, roaming over the achievements of the Labour Government since 1997. He says he has more to do in the months that are left to him but it is difficult to see how that is going to work. The Party’s Spring Conference is in February. Another valedictory speech there? If not, then what? Then the Scottish Parliamentary and Welsh Assembly elections in May – and the local government ones. And, while this happens, an unfolding debate on the future direction and leadership of the Party.

I have made it clear that I shall be deciding who gets my support on the basis of the candidates’ policy platforms. I am not signing any blank cheques. And there will, inevitably be differences in approach.

The Conference itself was the usual lobbyfest with the platform being overturned on two important issues. As soon as the votes were announced, some people were rubbishing the result saying they wouldn’t bind the Government. Perhaps, but with a leadership election months away, these Conferences votes may have more weight than usual.

On Housing, Conference voted for the third year running to allow Council’s to finance the renovation and improvement of their own housing stock – the so called fourth way – rather than transfer the council’s housing stock to other bodies.

On Health policy, Conference voted overwhelmingly on a show of hands against the privatisation agenda and specifically against the outsourcing of NHS logistics. The

NEC statement, which was rushed out to head off a vote against the platform, failed to convince. It told us what we already know: that policy making is the preserve of too few people and must be made more inclusive.

There was no debate allowed on Trident and the future of Britain's nuclear weapons, despite the fact that the PM has announced a decision will be made by the turn of the year! And he said he wanted a full and open debate! He has promised a White Paper setting out the Government's position, and then a vote. This is unacceptable to me. I want to see a Green Paper setting out all the options before a Commons vote.

The week after next, MPs return to Westminster and, in November, the Queen's Speech for the new session. Around this time, we expect Deputy Assistant Commissioner Yates to hand his file over to the Crown Prosecution Service on the "cash for honours" allegations. We know that three people have been arrested and released (but not charged) and we learn today that Ruth Turner, one of the PM's gatekeepers at Number 10 has been interviewed.

Locally, the big issue is the future of Accident and Emergency at Burnley. I am writing to the Joint Scrutiny Committee next week to ask if I can speak to their meeting on 12 October. I want to urge it to call on Patricia Hewitt to bring in the Independent review Panel. I refuse to accept the closure of blue light A&E at Burnley.

No St. geyr.
no nurseries

The Conservatives have now chosen their candidate for the next General Election, Andrew Stephenson, who is only 25 and, as yet, little known. But I expect him to start making waves soon. The Lib Dems are, I think, to choose their candidate shortly. This will be a break from past practice for them. They usually leaves things very late.

Earlier today I was at St John Southworth primary school where the children are learning German. The only primary school in Pendle where this happens. Tomorrow, I shall be at Barnoldswick fire station meeting the firefighters.

With controversial proposals coming on health and the fire service we have our work cut out for us. We shall need to raise our game.

Gordon Prentice MP
29 September 2006

Ms Def 5 day
Jim Devine

future has kinder

~~Dorothy~~
fakes itain -
Alan Newbold.
"do it but don't fail"
Frank - making lunch
- galaxy

→ new hospitals
80
→ close function.
unhanded

Gender
50:50

REPORT TO GC AUGUST 2006

August is billed as the holiday month and yet things seem to happen. John (Bush is crap) Prescott was minding the shop, while war raged in the Middle East. The Prime Minister was on the beach in Barbados, relaxing in Cliff Richard's villa and having a break from the stresses and strains of the job. The relationship between Cliff and the Blairs started a view years ago when Cherie asked him for tickets to one of his concerts. From there it developed. Dinners - but no talk of politics. And then the offer of the villa when Cliff decided the PM needed R and R after the Iraq War.

The way in which the Government responded to the conflict in Lebanon has, I believe, caused us great damage. I was one of the hundred plus Labour MPs who called for the recall of Parliament and I wrote to the Prime Minister urging him to call for an immediate and unconditional cease fire. He eventually did this, but way too late. My colleague from next door, Kitty Ussher, complained in a piece in the New Statesman that it seemed as if the Prime Minister thought it was OK to kill Muslims. Heavy stuff.

On the back of all this, the Government has resurrected the proposal for a new Commission on Cohesion and Integration which is to report next July to Ruth Kelly, the newish Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Its remit is wide ranging. She says it can go anywhere - except into two ring fenced areas. Britain's foreign policy and faith schools.

Under this Government religion has moved from being something for personal choice and belief to be a central matter of public policy. I remember when public money couldn't be used to support religion in any way, shape or form. No grants for the leaky church roof. Now public money is routinely channelled into faith and inter-faith organisations and no one bats an eyelid. I believe "integration and cohesion" should take place as part of a citizenship rather than a faith agenda. As I have said on many occasions, my politics are secular.

Given the steady drip of corrosive headlines, it is no surprise that our support has dropped to a nineteen year low and that the Conservatives are nine points ahead of us. And yet we still whistle inately to keep our spirits up. Financial support is drying up, other than our friends in the trade unions, and the police may yet hand their file on "cash for honours" to the CPS which triggers a prosecution. The Government could not survive this.

We will find out at Conference how bad the financial position is, but we read that one in five of the Party's full time staff may have to be made redundant.

The Conference in Manchester is being billed as some kind of High Noon, with the Prime Minister being urged to give us all an indication of when he is going to go. I would put money on him staying beyond May, which is the 10th anniversary of his Premiership. The problem is that we have major Scottish Parliamentary and Welsh Assembly elections that month and I do not believe for one moment that we will do well if he is still at the helm.

House of Lords

The tragedy is that we have a good story to tell but people are no longer listening. The Times remind us today that national income has risen by 24% after inflation since 1997. And average household disposable income, which means money available for spending after tax and housing costs, has gone up by 26% in real terms. So, by and large, most people are better off. And even pensioners, as a group, are no more likely to be "poor" than any other group in society.

Yet despite this record, some grotesque inequalities remain. Former Cabinet Minister, Stephen Byers, with an ever present eye on the headlines, called for the abolition of Inheritance Tax! Which planet is he on? IHT brings in over £3.3 billion and I could probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of people paying IHT in Pendle. IHT comes in at £280,000. Polly Toynbee reminded us in Tuesday's Guardian that the top one per cent of the population owns 23% of everything. The bottom 50% owns just 6%. And if you take homes out the equation, then the top 1% owns 63% of all other assets. The bottom half owns just 1%

On the horizon, we have a looming debate on the future of Trident. We now know that the decision will be made by the end of this year after the publication of a White Paper which, says the PM, will give details of how Parliament is to be consulted. This is really not good enough. I want to see a Green Paper setting out all the options and a free vote in Parliament. I think the Government is dangerously out of step with public opinion on this issue - but we all have our own views.

Locally, the future of the Fire Brigade makes the headlines. Since the last GC I have met with the Chief Fire Officer, Peter Holland, and with Steve Harman the FBU Secretary here in Lancashire. A three month public consultation has now started which proposes a reduction in nine fire engines across the county. It is proposed that we lose one in West Craven and another in Colne. A new fire station would be built at Salterforth and the ones in Barnoldswick and Earby would be closed. No changes are proposed to Nelson Station.

The council has finally come off the fence on the question of using Bent Head playing fields for the new Marsden Heights Secondary School. The council has taken a pragmatic line, agreeing with the county that once the new school is completed, Edge End will be knocked down to become open space. There will be three new football pitches, a cricket pitch and changing facilities.

You may also have read in today's local papers about how the Lib Dem Council is saving the Earby Youth Hostel! I am keeping my fingers crossed that this hostel, the home of Katherine Bruce Glasier, a leading light in the ILP, can be saved.

On the health front, I see that Kath Reade, formerly Chair of the (now abolished) Cumbria & Lancs. SHA is to be the new Chair of our local, expanded, Primary Care Trust. Good news!

GORDON PRENTICE MP
25.8.06.

Byers
Not available
at local
level

No
Green
Paper

retained
control
room to
warn to
2008 -
2 -
contracted
out.

David
Whigg

Fire
Improve
Health

School
to

Royal Charles YHH

Chair Tennant

Andy Smith

- Robert Pauline

Report to GC

28 July 2006

*- 1 sheet of paper 1 pencil
- Not a lot of things about
- all waste time 12*

I have been on jury service this week, Parliament having drawn stumps for the summer. I am sitting at Blackfriars Crown Court and have "dealt" with one case already. It has got me thinking about the criminal justice system – the positive and the negative.

*wigs 9/
91 F*

At Westminster, we left for the recess just when the Middle East is going up in flames. There should be a call from the British Government for an immediate ceasefire. It is quite staggering that almost every other country in the world has called for this to happen yet we seemed to be tongue tied. We shall see what comes out of the Prime Minister's visit to Washington.

*- Hizbollah
- release
- prisoners
- internationally
- recognised
- borders (67)*

*Yo! Blair! affectionate
with some patronising*

Over the past few weeks the Government has been marching us up the hill and down again. We all know about the Lancashire Cumbria police merger which is apparently off... or on hold depending which Minister you talk to. The Home Information Packs are also off – or at least that bit that deals with home condition surveys. I have a constituent who borrowed £7,000 to train as a home inspector and he tells me there will be no work for him. Not necessarily true but, still, he has a right to feel aggrieved.

*Such
Strom*

We are also now promised a vote on Trident. But we shall have to read the small print very closely. There was a story planted in the press a few days ago suggesting the life of the existing system could be extended and there was no need to decide on any replacement in this Parliament.

*- in its
response to
Defence Select
Committee
report*

Trident

I want a green paper setting out all the options and a vote in Parliament before the Government takes any decision. I don't want any clever bobbing and weaving by Ministers.

Some important statements were made over recent days. The Child Support Agency is to be abolished. The performance of the CSA has been woeful. Only one in three parents with care receive any maintenance. And the CSA runs at a net cost to the taxpayer of £200 million a year. The government's thinking is still not settled and there is a consultation on the proposals until 18 September.

*CSA
Sir David
Hewson
birth certificate*

The Department of Health is consulting on its commissioning agenda – bringing in more "providers" and developing the choice agenda. Extreme vigilance is required here!

And John Reid is continuing his drive to make the Home Office and the Immigration and Nationality Department "fit for purpose". Aaaaaaargh!

Locally, the planned reorganisation of the fire service reawakens old memories of previous attempts. Politically it is toxic, but we need the facts from the fire service and from the firefighters. Again, there is a consultation.

*Fire
Time*

Local
NHS

I was gratified to see that the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee has asked Patricia Hewitt to call in the independent review panel to look afresh at the proposals to change the pattern of hospital provision in East Lancashire. I hope she listens and does not reject the request (only 3 out of 10 previous requests have been acceded to).

The local patients watchdog has come down against the changes – just at the time when the department of Health is issuing another consultation paper on the new “local involvement networks” which are to replace the “public and patient involvement forums” which themselves replaced the old community health councils.

My select committee continues to add colour to the political scene at Westminster with recent reports on occupational pensions and the ombudsman; political memoirs and an interim report on the honours system. We have another coming out in September on the Ministerial Code. And we shall return to the so called “cash for honours” in due course.

The Party Conference in September looks like being an important event (unusual these days).

And we have August to get through with the Deputy Prime Minister at the helm.

Gordon Prentice MP

28 July 2006

REPORT TO GC MEETING 30 JUNE 2006

The result this morning of the Blenau Gwent by-election was a shock. I thought we would win back this formerly rock solid Labour seat from the Independent, Peter Law, who won it following a long running dispute over an imposed all women short list. The Assembly seat was also lost to Law's widow. This means that the Assembly does not have an overall Labour majority. In Chislehurst & Bromley, we were never serious contenders, but to come in fourth after UKIP was ignominy we could have done without. Next May we have important Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament elections and we have our work cut out for us if we are to do well. Here at Westminster, a 1% swing against Labour would lose us our majority.

Unfortunately, a whole series of bad news headlines over the past couple of months has put the Government on the back foot. Only today, we learn of a so-called "secret plan" to privatise an entire tier of the NHS, allegedly worth up to £64 billion to the private sector. Private companies could take over the commissioning role of PCTs to purchase health care for NHS patients. This is completely unacceptable.

Locally, disquiet over the Clinical Services Review continues to mount. Only today, I heard from the Patient & Public Forum of the East Lancashire Hospitals telling me they believe the consultation so far has been seriously flawed and is "meaningless", offering "little chance to influence the way in which hospital services will be delivered in the future". I am formally responding next week, having held off to allow local GPs to get back to me with their views.

The two options put forward in the consultation exercise do not meet my concerns. No clinician has told me that the separation of planned care and blue light Accident and Emergency is misconceived, so I do not quarrel with this thinking. But I do not believe it is in the interests of Pendle people to have their local A&E department in Blackburn. And I have no confidence that the Ambulance Service will be able to deliver people with life threatening conditions to Blackburn while they are still breathing. The consultation document was very thin indeed on how the Ambulance Service was expected to respond to this new challenge: we have been given no details of future additional staffing requirements and have received only vague assurances about the number of additional ambulances (2) and extra paramedics.

We are told that if and when Burnley General becomes an "urgent care centre" 87% of people currently treated at Burnley's A&E will continue to be seen there. However, this also means that close to 8,000 patients will no longer go to Burnley but will have to be taken to Blackburn. I shall be urging the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Lancashire County Council and Blackburn and Darwen to recommend to the Health Secretary that the Independent Review Panel is brought in to look at the proposals afresh.

Fortunately, all is not doom and gloom! A central problem is that the Prime Minister and some of his senior colleagues do not constantly remind people of the progress we have made. Instead we get the rhetoric of endless reform and reorganisation and talk of dysfunctional Government departments which are not "fit for purpose". (If I hear that phrase again I shall scream)

*Trident - white paper by end of the year
- public opinion ahead
of politicians
Don't renew.*

Ministers, having told people how terrible things are, compound the problem by behaving like Leninists. I am fed up with New Labour as a vanguard Party! Why on earth embark on an energy review just so the Prime Minister can tell us before it has been concluded that there is no alternative to nuclear power stations? Why say there should be a debate on the future of Trident and then close things down by refusing to give Parliament a vote? My views on this issue are absolutely mainstream and I simply do not meet people who believe we need to spend billions on a new generation of nuclear weapons. Indeed, I feel vindicated by the report, published today, of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee (no rolling eyed lefties there!) who want a public debate and deplore the unwillingness of the Ministry of Defence to co-operate with their inquiry. If Gordon Brown goes ahead with a son of Trident I most definitely shall not be voting for him.

*Sure Start
children
Centres
Colne*

To get people back on our side we need to give them good reasons. In my experience most people are pretty fair minded and they give the Government the benefit of the doubt so long as they feel it is going in the right direction. This morning, I spent time with the Sure Start Waterbridge people, meeting the staff, mothers and children and talking about the future of the programme. Since 1997 we have created nationally 1.2 million new childcare places. We should celebrate that fact. And we are on course to have over 2500 Children's Centres by 2008. And some of these Children's Centres are superb. Gleaming, shiny new buildings that we should be proud of. The one in Colne opposite the Parish Church will open on schedule on 6 November and I had a look round today as the building work goes towards completion. It will be a building Colne can be proud of, occupying the site of the old Cloth Hall. Apart from facilities for parents and children, there will be more than enough space for health professionals such as Health Visitors and Dentists (with 2 new surgeries). The building is costing about £1.4 million, which is money well spent.

Free travel

Our proposals for concessionary fares are also potentially hugely popular. There have been teething problems involved in the administration of over 300 schemes across England, with problems involving the boundaries of free travel areas and the times during which the free travel applies. There is a confusing multiplicity of schemes which has taken the shine off the idea. But, in 2008, all this will be swept away and there will be one scheme for the whole of England. This means that pensioners will be able to travel all over the country for nothing.

*Export
Control
Orders*

Earlier this week I was over in Strasbourg for a meeting of the Council of Europe - the Human Rights watchdog. We debated "extraordinary rendition" which got the C of E on to the front pages of national newspapers for the first time. Evidence is hard to come by, but many are convinced that people suspected of terrorism by the CIA have literally been snatched by squads of men dressed in black, bundled into planes and taken to the far side of the world for interrogation. Chilling. And we wait to see what more comes out. I take the view that it is entirely possible to fight terrorists and the lunatics who want to destroy our way of life and still protect an individual's human rights.

Two other points. The monarchy costs each of us 62p per year. Oh yeah? And the Borough Council is consulting on whether to designate new town and parish councils.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
30.6.06

*Blunkett
Jack Straw
left them
in a mess.*

*→ Sir David Hughes
John Kennedy
70,000*

- Kate Beards

Hardy Hill road - lib -> independent
Brown
Barker
Dorothy + Colin 8p.
Election: bank group
BNP poster in window - respectable.
- poor results in local 2004 won General Election 2005

REPORT TO GC 26 MAY 2006

The Government is going through a bad patch. The run-up to the local elections could not have been worse, with the Health Secretary being jeered by nurses; the John Prescott business and the spreading stain of the cash for honours scandal. Our vote plummeted nationally and we lost over 300 councillors. In Burnley, we lost control and Stuart Caddy, the Labour Leader, lost his seat. Here in Pendle, we came third in terms of the vote. The Lib Dems took 41.4%; the Conservatives 24.5% and Labour 23.5%. And the others - the BNP - took 10.4%, although they were only standing in six wards.

Here are the percentages for the BNP in the wards they contested: Boulsworth 36.5 : Cloverhill 22.4 : Craven 25 : Horsfield 28.7 : Marsden 38.3 and Vivary Bridge 26.1.

The BNP campaign received turbo-charged help from the Government, with the news that foreign criminals were being released on to the streets without being considered first for deportation.

Immediately after the local elections the Prime Minister embarked on his long awaited reshuffle, with the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke being sacked. His replacement, John Reid, now tells the world that the Home Office is "seriously dysfunctional". And this is coupled with news stories about indefinite leave to stay in the country in return for sex. And we find that the Chief Immigration Officer at the centre of this scandal was himself an illegal immigrant. You couldn't make it up!

There are huge dangers in all this, for if people start to believe that the Government is (a) incompetent and (b) sleazy, our support will evaporate. It is against this background that we have had turmoil in the Parliamentary Labour Party. At our meeting on 8 May, the Prime Minister was on the back foot, conceding to pressure from MPs that he would give "ample time" for his successor to get his or her feet under the table before the next General Election. My own view is that it needs to be sorted out quickly. This time next year we have elections to the Scottish Parliament and to the Welsh Assembly as well as some major council elections and if we do badly again it will be difficult to recover our position. And, in the very short term, we have the by-election coming up at Blaenau Gwent on 29 June. We lost this rock solid Labour seat (majority 19,000) to the late Peter Laws who had been a life-long Labour Member and stood as an Independent, following the imposition of an all-women short list.

(As an aside) I read that Tonia Barton, the Chair of the Pendle Conservative Association, doesn't want anyone from Cameron's A List foisted on them. The Daily Telegraph warned that local Conservative Associations would not tolerate "mincing metrosexuals"!

This week the PLP was convulsed by the debate on the Education and Inspections Bill which allows schools to go for Trust status, where they will be able to form partnerships with business, commercial and other organisations and take control of land, buildings and other assets from the local authority. The Bill got through only because of Conservative support. They believe that all schools should be "independent" within the State sector. This terminology was used in the Government White Paper last year, although concessions were subsequently made to placate Labour MPs. The Conservatives want schools to be able to

/cont...

vary the terms and conditions of employees and to break up national pay bargaining. This Bill will make it easier for them to do this when they next form a government. More Labour MPs voted against the Bill's Third Reading than at any time since the Ramsey MacDonald government in the 1920s. I voted for an amendment requiring parents to be balloted before a school became a Trust school, but this was lost. It will be up to the Governors, after consultation. I also voted for another amendment to end the 11+ which, amazingly, still exists in some parts of the country. This too was lost when the Conservatives voted with the Government. Another example of the most amazing cross-dressing imaginable.

Underlying many of the concerns is the feeling that Government policy is leading to the marketisation of health and education. Concerns about privatisation have also surfaced in the Royal Mail, where the Communication Workers Union has lambasted proposals to give shares to all employees. It is suggested that the shares would not be tradeable in the open market, but the UCW fears that this would inevitably happen.

We have also had a major statement from the Prime Minister in favour of nuclear power despite the fact that the Government has not responded to the Energy Review it initiated. The last Energy White Paper was published as recently as 2003 and there were no plans then to build a new generation of nuclear power stations. Nuclear currently supplies 8% of UK primary energy. And, although it is portrayed as "being clean" no long term solution has yet been found for the disposal of nuclear waste. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority has estimated that the costs of dealing with existing waste are likely to reach £70 billion.

electronic
generation
19%
nuclear
very central
production
1.
wired
silver

We also had an important statement yesterday on pensions policy. The Government's proposals build on the recommendations of the Turner Commission and have been broadly supported. Retirement ages are to be raised reflecting our increasing longevity. But the proportion of life spent in work will remain unchanged. Pensions are going to be more generous and the link between pensions and earnings is to be restored in 2012. (I have been calling for this for years and have a piece on my website saying just that.)

The Government's track record on pensioners is pretty good, even though we all know we could do more. Pensioners are now less likely to be poor than younger people and with the Pension Credit the minimum income pensioners are entitled to has gone up from £68.80 pw in 1997 to over £114 today. One of the key things that distinguishes from the Conservatives over this period is our handling of the economy. Unemployment under the Conservatives hit 3 million twice. Now we have the highest employment rate of any of the G8 countries. And 2.3 million more people are now in work compared to 1997.

Locally, the big debate over the Clinical Services Review continues to rage. I have written to all local GPs and I am keen to hear from people employed in the local NHS in whatever capacity. The Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale PCT is to merge with Hyndburn and Ribble Valley, we can live with this. It could have been much worse.

Finally, congratulations to George and Rose on their elevation of first citizens of the Borough. I am looking forward to welcoming them at Westminster next month for the traditional dinner.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
26.5.06

Victims now free
PCT board

Camping my
banned in cities!!
Bill Clegg - much whole not rambling 77.

REPORT TO A.G.M. FEBRUARY 2006

We are now on the threshold of a period of unprecedented upheaval and change in health, education, policing and, shortly, local government. Last week I circulated all Pendle members with details of the timetable for the myriad consultations that are now taking place. I shall be making my own submissions and writing to the Council Scrutiny Committee in due course.

Police
It is critically important we get these changes right. On policing, the Cumbria and Lancashire Police Authorities today agreed to merge and we need to ensure (as I said last month) that Lancashire's council tax payers do not carry the cost burden. We also need details of how this merger will affect local policing at basic command unit level.

Not seen Public Health District Police area - the old St & area!
On health, consultation on the new structures is now under way although the one on the future of Burnley General Accident & Emergency Department (The Critical Care Review) does not launch until March - in the run up to the local elections. I want to see a fully fledged A & E at Burnley and the local papers today give a great deal of coverage to the pros and cons of a moved to planned care only at Burnley. Journey times to Blackburn by ambulance could be up to 30 minutes from parts of Pendle - on a good day. I shall be speaking about these issues to the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale UNISON Health Branch at Turf Moor next Thursday. On Friday of next week, I shall be officially opening the Barkerhouse Pharmacy.

commissioning provided split Not the way to make
On education, we all wait for the publication of the Education Bill next week. The Government has moved in some way to reassure its critics but we need to see the small print. At his press conference yesterday, the Prime Minister seemed to indicate that he would be content to get the legislation on the statute book with Conservative support, although he conceded that he "would like to do it with the majority of Labour MPs in support." If the Bill is widely supported in the PLP it will be a remarkable transformation for a measure which was dubbed by Neil Kinnock as "at best a distraction, at worst dangerous" (or words to that effect). I spoke to students at the University of Lancaster Labour Club earlier today on these challenges.

I mentioned last week the forthcoming White Paper on local government which is expected in the summer. It is likely to propose a move towards unitary local authorities, but I am not yet sure whether this will be imposed across the country or whether it will be a matter for local areas to decide what structure they want. It is important that we take a view. Certainly the pressure will be for bigger councils, perhaps mirroring the move to bigger organisations in the other public services. *BPT & R local authority but no PCT to match it*

At Westminster, things have been hectic. We have survived the aftermath of the Dunfermline by-election, where Rachel Squires' majority of 11,500 was overturned. There were local factors at play - a major redundancy of 700 at a print works in the constituency and a hiking of the road tolls on the Forth Bridge. The Conservatives - or at least some of them - are beginning to get nervous about Cameron's move to the centre. The Liberal Democrats share these concerns. Projections of recent opinion polls on the website: www.electoralcalculus.co.uk, show a swathe of Lib Dem seats falling to the Conservatives. For information, Pendle stays Labour. The Lib Dems are to elect their new leader next week and the bookies favourite seems to be the comparatively unknown Chris Huhne. Yesterday's Evening standard told me that he has no fewer than nine homes! He is also apparently, very

Manifesto points.

boring!

We shall have our own change of leader in due course and my preference would be for the Prime Minister to go sooner rather than later to give the new person time to bed in. I also believe there should be a contest, and not just a coronation.

Talking of which, my personal view is that Prince Charles should stick a sock in it. Once he strays from architecture and horticulture, he tends to get into hot water. And it would be best for the monarchy if he keeps his views to himself.

At Westminster, we have had series of important votes. On smoking, I voted for a complete ban. The Government allowed us a free vote, taking us beyond our Manifesto position. We said in our Manifesto that we would legislate to ensure that all enclosed public spaces other than licensed premises would be smoke free. And that all pubs and bars preparing and serving food would be smoke free and others would be free to choose. In membership clubs, the members would be free to choose whether to allow smoking or be smoke free.

Smoking
manifesto
didn't check.

Religious
Hatred

On Religious Hatred, we now have a new offence on the statute book, but based on the legislation as it left the House of Lords. I voted against the Government because I believed the new offence (with prison sentences of up to 7 years) should have to be based on intention and not simply recklessness. I also believe it should not be a criminal offence to say something about a religion that is simply abusive or insulting. The legislation would have banned the infamous Mohammed cartoons - and presumably, cartoons of L. Ron Hubbard found to be abusive or offensive by Scientologists. I strongly disapprove of publishing material simply to upset people, but the question is whether it should be made a crime. That said, we now read that the BNP is likely to reproduce these cartoons in its literature for the up-coming local elections.

fulfills
manifesto
commitment

Barron
Nixon
Turner
Tee

ID cards
not
voluntary

On ID cards, where we have a clear Manifesto commitment, I supported the Government, but very unwillingly. The Information Commissioner, an independent person of stature, has talked about us sleepwalking into a surveillance society. The difficulty for me has never been the card itself, but the National Register which lies behind it. New legislation will be needed to make the card compulsory unless you are one of the 80% of the population that has a passport. From next year, when you passport is renewed you will have to have an ID card and give your biometrics. At the moment, a DNA profile is not required, but watch this space. DNA samples are now routinely collected by the police from people who have been picked up and then released without charge.

you - did
not
check to
e-virshi
20 days.

We also had another vote on the Terrorism Bill. When it was first in the Commons I voted against the proposal to detain people without charge for up to 90 days. This was the position of Lord Condon, the former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, who spoke when the Bill went on to the Lords. The Government accepted the 28 day compromise, originally proposed by my colleague, David Winnick. I voted for 28 days. The Bill came back from the Lords with the offence of glorification of terrorism struck out. The Prime Minister said that glorification needed to be reinstated to "send a signal". I could envisage circumstances where people exercising a legitimate right of protest could be arrested by the police for glorifying terrorism. The offence extends to past and future acts of terrorism.

90 days
not
in
manifesto

photo
demo
with calls
for beheading

GORDON PRENTICE MP

East's uprising.

27 February 2006

REPORT TO GC JANUARY 2006

A political earthquake is shaking the Liberal Democrats to their foundations. Who would have believed it possible that in the space of a few weeks the Party would have been reduced to this? The Lib Dems are tumbling in the polls and have clearly lost their reputation as being "nice people". Even before the Mark Oaten resignation, their MPs were slagging each other off oblivious to the impact this would have on public opinion. Chris Davies called Kennedy "a dead man walking". And they are being subjected to the kind of intense media scrutiny that we have always had to cope with. In an Energy debate in the Commons 10 days ago I learned that there is a long list of Lib Dem councils who have turned down applications for wind farms on their patch. And yet they peddle the myth that they are the green alternative.

For our part, the Government is facing major challenges and we will have to work hard to find a way through. The school reform proposals, as they stand, are simply unacceptable to a very large number of Labour MPs and yet the Prime Minister has consistently stated that they will not be changed. They must. The former Leader, Neil Kinnock, who has kept his own ~~council~~ *Council* for 14 years, broke ranks over the education reform earlier this month, when he said they were "at best a distraction and at worst, dangerous". I was at the packed meeting at Westminster where he and the former Education Secretary, Estelle Morris, made their positions clear. And, today, we have the publication of the report of the Education Select Committee which is highly critical of the Government's proposals. It makes the point that Trust schools didn't even feature in the Manifesto.

Still on this issue of the Manifesto (which is regarded by some as the Holy Grail) the Prime Minister has decided to allow Labour MPs a free vote on smoking and this is likely to result on an outright ban in pubs and clubs in 2007. I shall vote for a ban. The Prime Minister promised there would be no complete ban during the Election Campaign but, clearly, times and circumstances change.

The public services are in the middle of a maelstrom of change. I have never known anything quite like it. I met Malcolm Docherty who chairs the Lancashire Police Authority last week and it is clear that the top Lancashire police officers are in favour of the merger with Cumbria. It is difficult to argue against this if that is the considered professional view of the police, but there are financial considerations. Unless funding is made available from central Government, the effect of such a merger would be to push council taxes higher in Lancashire and reduce them in Cumbria! On health, there is a whirlwind of consultations planned. On the Ambulance Service, on the future of Primary Care Trusts and on the Clinical Services Review of the East Lancashire Hospitals Trust. The Trust Board has agreed to go out to public consultation in March with a "fifth option" which keeps blue light accident and emergency and intensive care at Burnley General Hospital. This is the option we must go for - anything else is politically toxic.

to Gordon Prentice

There are major debates coming up on ID Cards and the Terrorism Bill (both of which are in the House of Lords at the moment) and next week we get the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill back from the Lords. I think Sir Iqbal Sohrani made himself look foolish with his remarks about gay people. I thought it very intolerant of him.

On a positive note, the Government has decided not to change the present classification of cannabis, based on expert advice. I agree with this.

The whole issue of nuclear weapons is still very much a live one, given that the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary have indicated that a decision is likely to be taken in this Parliament on any replacement of Trident. I am speaking to students at the London School of Economics next month and I have also been invited to speak to students at Lancaster University on the same subject. I think the GC knows my views on Trident; it is a complete waste of money and the billions required for any replacement could be better spent.

The Conservatives under David Cameron are getting their confidence back and they hope to do well in the local elections in May, especially with the Liberal Democrats close to melt down. Their strategy is to divide the Prime Minister from Labour MPs by constantly suggesting that they will support him when he decides to take us on! There is no mileage in it for the Prime Minister to take on his own Party and the message from the upheavals over the education policy must be that working closely and cooperatively is the best way forward. This is what happened with the proposed changes to Incapacity Benefit which had been flagged up as a major flashpoint which could destabilise the Government. In the event, the announcement was broadly supported by us, stressing, as it did, the extra help that would be going to get people with disabilities into work where this is the best thing. It is clearly ludicrous that blind people should be regarded as permanently written off by the system. No one currently on IB will suffer any reduction in benefit and the new proposals will be introduced in stages.

I had dinner with the Principal of Nelson & Colne College last week with the Minister, Bill Rammall, and the other heads of all the Lancashire colleges. I think everyone found it useful.

Next week, I have a meeting with the East Lancashire Hospitals Patients and Public Involvement Team and the following Friday, with the East Lancashire Medical Committee, representing the area's doctors. This will be followed with a meeting with the Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust. We can't afford to get the NHS changes wrong.

GORDON PRENTICE MP

27.1.06

~~Party~~ Report
CC

reduce the role of ?

Dec 2005

-2-

Elsewhere, we had some horrors and disasters. From the London bombings in July to the earthquake in Kashmir. As it happens, I visited the epicentre of the earthquake, Muzaffrabad, about four years ago and I felt for the people caught up in it.

2
2006 is going to be a challenging year for us. The Government is determined to reorganise every part of the public sector that isn't nailed down. For example, many of my colleagues have grave reservations about the proposed changes to schools and I am supporting the "alternative Education White Paper" which has been published today (14 December). I cannot believe it is right to merge local education authorities, nor to make every school its own admissions authority. The Prime Minister is having endless meetings with Labour MPs to find a way through this and we wait to see. The Education Bill is scheduled for publication in February.

On the health front, we have seen major improvements, with Health Service spending doubled to over £75 billion in the last 5 years. We have a new medical centre at Yarnspinners in Nelson and next year a huge primary care centre will be opened in the centre of Burnley, a stone's throw from the bus station. And we have seen millions spent on Queen's Park in Blackburn and at Burnley General Hospital.

Unfortunately, we are now facing the distraction of huge organisational change in the NHS, which, I believe, we do not need. There are proposals to reduce the number of Strategic Health Authorities and to create new Primary Care Trusts. A public consultation is about to begin on these issues with our own Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale Primary Care Trust disappearing. The least worst option is a merger with the neighbouring Hyndburn and Ribble Valley PCT.

On the acute side, there are proposals to reconfigure hospital services at Burnley General and Blackburn. There are suggestions that Accident & Emergency at Burnley would only take planned admissions. There would also be implications for Intensive Care. I am not prepared to accept any changes which alter the status of A & E at Burnley.

On a more positive note. I think we have seen big improvements in NHS dentistry. We have 16 dental practices in Pendle, with 10 offering predominantly NHS treatment. We have a new practice in Barnoldswick which was set up following the decision of Adam Evans - who had taken £35,000 from the NHS to set up his practice in Skipton Road - to go private. The new NHS practice has three dentists and will offer 6,000 new dental registrations. Over 1500 patients have been allocated already. Nine practices have converted to the Personal Dental Services Contract - in effect doing NHS work - increasing the number of dental registrations by 13,100. A further two practices are currently expanding and will offer an additional 3,200 registrations. So lots of things are happening on this front and it is all good news.

There are also proposals to reorganise Ambulance Services and, of course, the police services, with Lancashire unlikely to survive in its current form, with a merger with Cumbria and Merseyside on the cards. There are rumblings about this, with police officers and others saying it is being rushed through far too quickly.

Elsewhere, we have a huge debate looming on pensions now that the Turner Report has been published and the Government will respond in the Spring. We also look forward to a lively debate on energy now that the Government has embarked on another energy review with nuclear power as an option. We have also seen the "Nuclear Deterrent" becoming an issue again, following the Prime Minister's announcement last May that a decision on replacing the Vanguard submarines and their Trident missiles would have to be taken in this Parliament. I have been very active in trying to get a debate going on this and I was astonished to learn that I have been nominated by the Channel 4 Political Awards Programme as a Campaigner of the Year! I have been here once before, I think it was hunting or, perhaps, the Right to Roam. And I did not get the award. I think the programme is likely to be transmitted at the end of January.

Locally, our Councillors have to deal with the Liberal Democrats at the Town Hall, whose duplicity and double standards are their hall marks. I hope we can make inroads into their majority at the Local Elections in May and we must all do our bit. Here in Westminster, the Liberal Democrats are in a state of crisis, with the whispering campaign against the Leadership of Charles Kennedy breaking out into the open. The election of David Cameron as Tory Leader could pose a problem for Liberal Democrat MPs in middle class suburban seats, which could go back to the Conservatives. Watch this space.

Locally, we have many challenges, but we have a good story to tell. Unemployment is low, the minimum wage has bedded in, inflation and mortgage rates are low and I remain optimistic about the future.

Can I wish everyone a very merry Christmas and a guid New Year.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
December 2005

Sedgfield - no vote

Ken:- PLP:-
:- happy

Ken Clarke -

(Cairn ground)

fair admissions -
selection by parent
interview.

Trident.
wh

REPORT TO G.C. OCTOBER 2005

The Government is sailing through choppy waters with its big reforms on health and now education. The Prime Minister told the Party Conference in Brighton last month that his big regret was not going far enough. He is certainly changing all that. He is behaving like a man on a mission. Whether he can take the Parliamentary Party with him is, at present, open to debate.

At last month's GC I outlined the new health proposals which would, amongst other things, take direct provision of non hospital NHS services away from the Primary Care Trust. Occupational therapists, physiotherapists, health visitors and the like would cease to be direct employees of the NHS and would transfer to other organisations in the private sector or not-for-profit and voluntary sectors. The role of the PCT would be to commission non hospital services from a constellation of new and probably untested providers. This is unacceptable to me.

The same thinking is now to be extended to education, where the Local Education Authority is to take on the role of commissioner and, more generally, supervising the delivery of education in its area. Parents are to be given an enhanced role. This brave new world does not appreciate how difficult it is at present to get parents involved. Look at the difficulty we have in getting people to volunteer as school governors. What we are witnessing is the "marketisation" of public services and many colleagues feel deeply unhappy with the direction of travel.

Elsewhere, the main controversy seems to be smoking and whether or not there should be a full or partial ban. There has been a huge amount of comment in the press with named Cabinet Ministers and it may be that this issue is being used as a proxy for other Cabinet battles on more substantial issues. On smoking, my own view is that there should be a complete ban. A partial ban would be a nightmare to police and we are still faced with the problem of protecting workers in the industry from inhaling second hand smoke. The idea of constructing hermetically sealed smoke-free rooms in bars is, I think, a total non starter.

Elsewhere at Westminster, we shall be debating the new Electoral Administration Bill. I will have an opportunity to kebab Shazad Anwar for his dirty tricks during the last Election when he included his relatives on the electoral register at his home at 34, Kibble Grove. If we are going to have postal voting (and we are) there must be safeguards against cheating. The best way is to have individual voter registration. Unfortunately, the Government is sticking to household registration.

On Monday we shall be having a discussion on the future of Trident. John Reid will endeavour to answer the points raised and we wait to see what happens. The whole debate was triggered by the Prime Minister back in June when he said a decision would have to be made in the course of this Parliament and that, further more, he would welcome the views of MPs. However, the Government is doing nothing to inform the debate and no Green Paper is to be published setting out the options to be considered. In fact, John Reid has told me that work on the options has barely begun. I take the view that Trident is a complete and utter waste of money.

/cont...

It cost £11 billion in 1994 when the first of the four Trident submarines was commissioned. Also in 1994 a decision was taken to "de-target" the missiles as, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no adversary. For over a decade the submarines have been prowling the ocean depths with missiles that aren't pointed at anyone in particular!

We also witnessed this month the huge devastation in Pakistan and Kashmir (and to a lesser extent India) as a result of the terrible earthquake. As it happens, I was in Muzaffrabad, the epicentre, four years ago, staying in an hotel perched precariously above the river. I suspect this hotel is now a pile of rubble. The British Government is underwriting the cost of flying relief materials via the Disasters Emergency Committee.

Turning now to local issues. We read in the newspapers today that there is a threat to the Intensive Care Unit at Burnley General. It was only done-up four years ago and probably cost an arm and a leg. There are 15 beds - nine earmarked for critical care and the balance for coronary patients. The idea that this unit should be located in Blackburn is preposterous. Imagine the logistics of getting someone from West Craven, who is knocking at death's door, over to Blackburn. And, what about the relatives, trekking over to Queens Park Hospital? I am meeting the Chief Executive of the East Lancashire Hospital Trust, Jo Cubbon, to discuss this and other matters next month. I suspect I shall hear more mumbo jumbo about the clinical benefits of relocation, but I am deeply sceptical.

I am also meeting some County Councillors in Preston next Friday to talk about Wakes Weeks and the Bent Head playing fields. I want to get an up-date on planning for the new secondary schools.

Elevate has now submitted its bid for funds to the ODPM. I am joining my East Lancashire colleagues in pressing for the full bid to be accepted.

A final word about Tax Credits. A fortnight ago we had the head of Revenue and Customs in front of my Select Committee. We tried to get to the bottom of the tax credit crisis, but were told that the computerised system is simply doing what it was programmed to do. We were told that the tax credit regime claws back overpayments that may have been made in one year, in the following year. However, demands for huge overpayments have been made by the Revenue - in one case £19,000 - and the Revenue seems to be pursuing people even when the recipient says they contacted the Revenue to query the arrival of a big cheque. I was told that the Revenue is working on digitising telephone calls between public and staff so an easily accessible record is made of calls.

My final final point! David Cameron is not half as good as he is cracked up to be. I still want David Davies to win, as I think it would be better for us. But if Cameron charms his way to the top, I think we can deal with him too.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
28.10.05

REPORT TO G.C. 30 SEPTEMBER 2005

We are now in the conference season and politics is back with a vengeance. Last week at the Liberal Democrat Conference, our very own brittle Tony Greaves got mentioned in the national press throwing a tantrum at the Lib/Dem plans to part privatise the Post Office. I described him as a smouldering little volcano who really ought to learn to keep his temper, but this was not picked up by the local press!

I was down in Brighton earlier this week, but came back after the PM's speech and missed Walter Wolfgang being thrown out for shouting "nonsense" during Jack Straw's speech. He is now a national celebrity, who today wrote the front page story in the Independent. The headline reads "We have been lied to about the war. I dared to speak the truth." There was, of course, no debate on Iraq despite the fact that the UN mandate expires in December and events are moving very quickly indeed. The British Army wants to withdraw. We know this because retired commanding officers are now speaking out and calling for withdrawal in the most unequivocal terms. The former Chief of Defence Staff, Lord Bramell and Sir Michael Rose, former Commander in Bosnia and an SAS man, both want out.

The Walter Wolfgang episode has triggered a huge debate about the Conference being stage managed and over controlled. I certainly found it very antiseptic, with everyone very well behaved. The spontaneity has been completely sucked out of Conference and I see that two thirds of MPs didn't bother to go and one third of CLPs didn't turn up. There is an issue about whether Conference matters, especially with the platform being overturned on a number of key issues such as council house stock transfer, pensions and retirement at 65 and the NHS reforms and the leadership merely shrugging their shoulders and saying "so what?" These defeats cannot simply be brushed off and I hope there will be some reconsideration when we get back to Westminster.

However, the omens are not good. The Defence Secretary, John Reid, told the Guardian earlier this month that it had not been decided whether MPs would get a vote on whether Trident was replaced. I am taking the issue to the PLP and am determined to press the issue to a vote.

Here in Pendle I have had a very interesting week with a work experience student from Colne, Laura Tweedie, helping me out. We went to a seminar organised by the Lancashire Police who are looking at ways of improving the organisation and delivery of services and there was a great deal of soul searching. We covered things like police culture and so on. But the great unmentionable was privatisation. I no longer think it is weird or eccentric to imagine some kind of privatised police force in the future. We also spent a day with a local RSPCA Inspector, checking on people who may be mistreating or abusing their animals. We also went to the Annual Meeting of the local Primary Care Trust and had an opportunity to chat to the senior management people. It is clear there is huge disquiet about impending changes to the health service. The PCTs were only set up three to four years ago and now the whole pack of cards is going to be thrown up in the air again. As the Prime Minister says, we are change makers, but why don't we just allow organisations that we have set up to bed in.

Trevor Phillips - ^{warms} Chilton, atomised
Chair of CRE Britain' balkanised

Will Hutton piece in Observer.

East Lewis together/
Building Borders

Men + Women

Last weekend I attended a conference of young Muslims in Nelson, to discuss attitudes and reactions after the London bombings. We have to move forward, but I was determined to remind people about the victims. That very day, the Guardian had carried a front page story about a young woman whose legs had been blown off. Young people have got to speak for themselves and given space and it was a good start and I hope something will come of it.

Next week, our attention turns to Blackpool, where the Conservatives will be having their Annual Conference. They are still in no fit state to challenge the Government. Their policy cupboard is bare and they are fighting like ferrets is a sack over the leadership. The latest news is that Edward Leigh, a member of the right wing so called Cornerstone Group, is calling for a flat rate income tax of 22% and the repeal of the Human Rights Act. Their Shadow Culture Secretary, Theresa May, is complaining that the leadership race is "too macho".

Finally, I foolishly wasted £25 on John Lee's book. My predecessor gives me a few brief mentions and quotes my first speech in the Commons. Or rather that bit of it when, by convention, I said that John Lee was a genial kind of guy.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
30.9.05

PCT.

Bewley - central Bewley

New dental practice open in Blide.
2 Polish dentists - 3rd arriving soon
Operating from 2 surgeries - Lib Dem.

Lance Price diaries

John - Old Police house

- private sector
regulated/
inspected

Edmund M...

from - R+D - wind
turbines
Hospital
Health

They work for you

for Tilly CAP-
Furniture biscuits £6.50 4/1.80

1st time
Imams come together
to speak with our voice

REPORT TO G.C. JULY 2005

Since the last GC a huge amount has happened. Most significantly, the London bombings and the news today that another two of the bombers have been caught. I hope this proves to be true. I told a meeting at Christ Church in Carr Road last Friday that the bombers were sad, pathetic, dysfunctional individuals, probably duped into their suicide mission. It was good that all the Imams in Pendle condemned the bombings without reservation, saying the bombers "ideology" had nothing to do with Islam. The bombers' strategy (in so far as we can understand it) is to sow discord and division between the Muslim and other communities in Britain. The Peace March organised last Friday shows they will not succeed here in Pendle nor, I suspect, anywhere else. The killing and maiming of innocent people will bring us all together. Home Office Minister, Hazel Blears, will be over in Burnley on 12 August to listen to the views of the community in East Lancashire.

Just before the bombings on 7 July, we had the announcement that London was to hold the Olympics in 2012. Parliament has acted speedily, authorising the setting up an Olympic Delivery Authority to make sure all the infrastructure and everything else is ready in time. It is a huge undertaking.

Locally, we have had the bad news about the collapse of Time Computers over in Simonstone, with 1100 jobs going. The Jobcentre people are working flat out to soften the blow and I am told that 7 major organisations in East Lancashire are currently recruiting over there. I don't know what caused the collapse, but I do know that the computer industry is intensely competitive.

Parliament has now risen for the Summer Recess and I, as usual, gave the Mayor and her Consort dinner at the Commons. We both tried very hard to steer our conversation away from contentious political issues! *Sharon Davies*

Back in the constituency, I have been out and about. This week I visited Pendleside Hospice and was reminded what a tremendous job they do. Earlier I met David Peat of the PCT to talk about yet another impending reorganisation of the NHS. The Government drive to expand patient choice has consequences for NHS structure. And I despair that the pack of playing cards is to be thrown up in the air yet again. I also went over to see the new Chief Executive of East Lancashire NHS Hospitals Trust, Jo Cubbon, at the new Queen's Park Hospital in Blackburn. We had a chance to talk about the temporary closure of the Marsden Ward at Pendle Community Hospital and her plans for relocating or "spinning out" hospital services to satellites such as P.C.H.

Still on health matters, the Primary Care Trust has decided to go ahead with two dental suites at the planned Park Avenue surgery in Barnoldswick, rather than the three it had envisaged. The blame for this state of affairs can be laid at the door of the Liberal dominated West Craven Area Committee. By sticking with two suites, updated and modernised, the PCT will not have to jump through the ridiculous planning hoops held up by Pendle Council. Three NHS dentist will be working the two dental suites more intensively.

2 came to
any time
Bristol
at 2000
in 2004

Charles
Chaplin
1917

Health

Therapy. Scanning

11

Elsewhere, I have been out talking to the young people at the Connexion Centre in Scotland Road, Nelson and with Rolls Royce in Barnoldswick about their plans for the new leisure centre. Last night, I was over in Clitheroe speaking to the Ribble Valley CLP and thanking them for their help in the General Election.

The other big news this week is, of course, the decision of the IRA to "end the war". I suppose the edge has been taken off this by the peace that we have experienced since the Good Friday Agreement. I think we must continue with cross border agreements with the Irish Republic and let the political situation there evolve and mature.

After the holidays the political year begins anew at the Party Conferences in September. I shall be going down to Brighton for a few days, but I also have a work experience student coming to the office that week. We are putting together an interesting programme for her. Including a day out with an RSPCA Inspector!

When Parliament resumes in the autumn we will be pitched into a debate on Clare Short's War Powers Bill which will require Government to seek Parliamentary approval before taking the nation to war. We will also have big policy debates on pensions (in particular the public sector pension schemes and retirement age); ID cards (with the controversial requirement to register certain facts with the National Identity Register) and, yet again, Asylum and Immigration, where the Government is proposing to end the practice of granting indefinite leave to remain in the UK to people who have been granted refugee status. In future, it will be temporary - up to five years - and if the situation in the country of origin has improve, the expectation will be that he or she will return.

We also have a big debate bubbling up on choice in the NHS and on the future of the Post Office. As part of the Warwick Agreement with the trade unions, the Government pledged to keep the Post Office 100% publicly owned, but there are suggestions that shares could be given to employees and some see this as opening the door for privatisation. As I explained at the last GC, I will be pressing for an open debate on the future of the British Nuclear Deterrent. I see that Robin Cook has written in today's Guardian arguing for a rethink on our nuclear weapons policy.

Finally, the Party has just produced a consultation document on the Partnership in Power process, conceding there is wide scepticism within the Party about the usefulness of the policy forums in influencing Government action. I have always believed that people need to know where the policy levers are and what happens when you pull them! I am hopeful that, with its smaller Commons majority, the Government will be more ready to listen.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
29.7.05

Local holidays - 5-10 next weekend 2 weeks in July
affiliated to Schools break in August. Then
a week in Sept.

reported to Committee
during last Friday.

Frank page

REPORT TO GC JUNE 2005

The week has been dominated by matters European and, coincidentally, I have been in Strasbourg with the UK Delegation to the Council of Europe. This is a human rights watchdog which also champions democracy and the rule of law. Earlier this month I was at the Paris Air Show where I met local firms such as Earby Light Engineering, who were exhibiting there. The double-decker A380 Airbus is hugely impressive. It is powered by Rolls Royce engines and the wings are made here in Lancashire.

As the UK's Presidency of the EU draws near the Prime Minister took the case for reform to the European Parliament sitting in Brussels. I agree entirely that the UK rebate should be non negotiable so long as the CAP retains the dominance it has in the EU Budget. I allowed myself a wry smile when the "barracking and booing" in the EU Parliament was described in the newspapers. This was vicar's tea party stuff compared to the bear pit of the Commons chamber. Blair handled it all with ease.

My absence abroad meant that I missed the Second Reading vote on the Racial & Religious Hatred Bill. This had come up at a house meeting on Sunday, when I expressed my reservations about the Bill. On the one hand it will raise expectations that there will be prosecutions, yet, on the other, Ministers have let it be known the Attorney General will act as a filter and we can expect, one a year, if that. The Bill now goes into Committee and will be considered line by line.

Satanic Verses.

Blair's
magical

bed of
system
open to
challenge
ridiculous
even
offence

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Next week the big issue will be the Identity Card Bill which comes up on Tuesday. All sorts of heavy weight organisations are against the Bill, including Liberty and major affiliates such as the T&G and the GMB. I don't have problems with the principle of the Bill and the Government has made it clear that anything beyond the necessary biometric identifiers and date of birth would require new primary legislation. There are concerns about the robustness of the technology and the cost of the cards. Ministers have made it clear that the cards would be voluntary and that people would not have to carry them on their person. However, it has been made explicitly clear that the objective is to move towards a compulsory card.

Another issue which is simmering away on the back burner concerns the future of Britain's nuclear deterrent. The Trident missile system costs about £15 billion and the Prime Minister has indicated that at some point in this Parliament a decision would have to be taken on its replacement. Notwithstanding what was said in the Election Manifesto, I hope the Party and the Government will take a deep breath before committing huge sums of money to retaining the "independent" nuclear deterrent. There are those who say that our seat in the UN Security Council rests on our nuclear status. There are other considerations too. But things have come to an unusual state of affairs when the former Tory Defence Secretary, Michael Portillo, is calling for the money which would be spent on the deterrent, being switched to mainstream Defence. I intend to help get the debate going by tabling a motion to the Parliamentary Labour Party, questioning the wisdom of spending billions on the nuclear deterrent.

Paul

Pres
Chair
body
Sweeney
in
parliament

Blair
quote

Robert McNamara

27 Oct

1962

4-30

Pres
Chair
body
Sweeney
in
parliament

50:50

10 years

In my travels round the constituency I constantly see what a million pounds here and a million pounds there can do. Last weekend I was at the opening of the flagship Walton Lane Children's Centre (cost £1.75 million) and this morning I had a private tour of the new Beacon Sure Start Children's Centre in Whitefield (cost £1 million plus) which I am opening officially on 17 July. I had an opportunity to speak to the architect who was on site and the building is awesome. It is already up and running and packed full of toys and children! I had the opportunity to speak to the staff working there and what a difference it must make to be based in such a splendid facility. That area of Whitefield is being utterly transformed for the better.

This afternoon I was at Sacred Heart Primary School in Red Lane, Colne, where the children prayed for me. Beat that! The school runs a breakfast club and an after school club and the Government is, of course, making available extra cash to encourage schools to be open for the extended day. There are issues about funding and, its adequacy, and I shall be pursuing these.

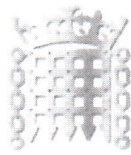
However, for every success there is another challenge. The news that the local NHS plans to temporarily close the Marsden Ward at the Pendle Community Hospital from September has not gone down well. People find it inexplicable that so much money can go into the NHS and yet these things happen. We are not alone. Press reports today tell us that the NHS in England went £140 million into the red last year because of poor financial controls and, it is said, inadequate financial expertise. I have arranged to meet David Peat, Chief Executive of the PCT and Jo Cubbon, Chief Executive of the Hospital Trust to discuss the issue.

DENTISTS IN BARLICK

Much closer to home (literally) a totally manufactured controversy rages about the new dental practice in Park Ave., Barnoldswick. From September, we will be getting a three surgery NHS practice for Barlick. and Earby people. This will, I hope, pull the rug from under the appalling Adam Evans, who took £38,000 of NHS money to set up his Diamond Smiles dental practice in the town in (I think) 2001 and has since gone private. Some local people are saying they don't want the dentists near them, as if dentists carry the bubonic plague! During the Election I said that getting dentists back into the town where I live would be a personal crusade, and it is.

Last Friday, I had a meeting with Chief Superintendent Graham, who is in charge of policing in Pendle. We discussed a range of issues, including the Dispersal Orders currently in place in Brierfield.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
24.6.05



Parliamentary Report

From Gordon Prentice MP
Member of Parliament for Pendle

10th May 2005

Dear Friends,

We are back!

Labour has been returned for an historic third term and I think we can congratulate ourselves on a good campaign.


I want to thank everyone who got involved in whatever way. We were up against a formidable Conservative campaign and a good candidate in Jane Ellison. The Liberals ran their most mendacious election ever, constantly misrepresenting my position and that of the Party. They circulated a blizzard of high quality glossy leaflets and we shall be going through their return of election expenses with a fine tooth comb. As you may know, we also referred to the police the simultaneous registration of Shazad Anwar's relatives in Burnley and Pendle and we shall want to follow this up.

I feel energised by the result and the challenges ahead. In Pendle over the next few years, we shall be building on the foundations we have already laid, in terms of the new secondary schools, children's centres, the housing renewal and Sure Start. And I am making it a personal priority to get NHS dentistry back on its feet over the next 12 months.

Nationally, we have a full programme as set out in the Manifesto (zillions of copies here at Carr Road for those who want one). And I look forward to delivering what we promise.

I am writing this on the morning of Tuesday 10 May and the Ministerial appointments have now been finalised. As always, there are winners and losers, but some appointments do make me gasp.

The new Parliament assembles at Westminster tomorrow, Wednesday, for the election of the Speaker and Mick Martin will be elected unopposed. And then we take the Oath of Allegiance. The new PLP meets on Wednesday evening to hear the Prime Minister. It is certain to be a fascinating meeting. The Session kicks off proper on 17 May, with the Queen's Speech, which sets out the Government's legislative programme. I am sure there will be Bills bringing back legislation that had to be dropped in the run up to the General Election. I am also keeping my fingers crossed that we get a new Electoral Practices Bill which clears up all the ambiguities and problem areas, such as postal voting, which have damaged confidence in the integrity of our democracy. Given the way the Liberals have behaved locally, I shall be making this a personal priority to get involved.



While the papers are focusing on the Prime Minister and how he can keep a tight rein on the Government, the Opposition parties have their own problems. The Conservatives got our their core vote, but they were incapable of attracting the middle ground. Their campaign was very focused on a small number of issues and failed to get across any kind of vision of Britain under the Conservatives. As for the Liberals, I think they will look back on this election as a missed opportunity. They got a huge boost from people who were against the Iraq War, from alienated former Labour supporters and from young people angry about tuition fees.

I think we probably lost about three or four percent of our votes to the Liberal Democrats and we shall have to work hard to get them back. I think of them "on loan" to the Lib.Dems! Certainly the Iraq War (we hope) will not be an issue next time round.

There are a huge number of challenges ahead for the Party nationally and locally and for everyone interested in politics it will be a fascinating period. Here in Pendle, I hope we can revitalise the CLP and get more people involved, especially younger ones. And I hope we will make a big effort to increase our strength on Pendle Council. The County Council Elections on 5 May went well over all, with Labour retaining Lancashire. But we lost some good comrades. Dorothy Ormrod and Colin Waite didn't deserve to lose. They have done a huge amount for the area. Our congratulations go to Tim Ormrod, who held his seat and our thanks to Sheila Wicks, Frank Allanson and Tony Holian, who put up a good show.

Here at Carr Road things are changing too. Jill, who has worked with me for a couple of years, has decided, reluctantly, to move on to pastures new and she will be doing a full time job at the Department for Work & Pensions. This opens a vacancy in my office for a part time (20 hours) Clerical/Administrative position. I am very keen to offer this job to someone in the Pendle Party. It is interesting work in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere! If you are interested, please write to me and I will let you have details.

Yours sincerely


GORDON PRENTICE MP

REPORT TO GC MAY 2005

The General Election was a mere three weeks ago and yet already it seems like history. Down at Westminster the new MPs are making their maiden speeches and settling in and our focus turns to the new Session ahead which will be fascinating and controversial in equal measure.

The Liberal Democrats give the appearance of contentment with their extra 11 seats, but with 62 MPs, they are not going to be necessarily setting the agenda. I believe this Election was their high water mark and as Iraq fades from public consciousness - and as they are forced to choose to move to the right or to the left - their appeal will dwindle and their glitter fade. As for the Conservatives, they are in a state of high anxiety. Michael Howard prepares to step down - but not yet - and the rule book may be re-written to set "performance contracts" on Tory MPs! This has gone down like a lead balloon. How does one fit in part time work for a merchant bank with such a contract? There are six, possibly more, contenders for the Tory crown and we shall have to see how things unfold over the summer.

61.5%
The bottom line is this. The Election returned Labour for an historic third term, with 355 of the 645 seats contested. The Conservatives won 197 (below our 1983 nadir) and, as I say, the Lib Dems, 62. We took 35.2% of the vote, the Conservatives 32.3% and the Lib Dems 22.1%. Turn out was 65.1% Here in Pendle, we took 37.1% of the vote (down 7.5% since 2001); the Tories 31.8% (minus 2.1%) and the Lib Dems 23.2% (plus 9.4%) with the others taking 8%. Turn out was 63.5%

As you know, the Lib Dem campaign plumbed new depths in mendacity and misrepresentation. And I shall be drawing on our experiences here in Pendle when the proposed Electoral Administration Bill comes before the Commons. This Bill will tighten up postal voting and other matters that have caused concern. We wait to hear from Pendle's Chief Executive about his investigations into double registration of Shazad Anwar's relatives in the Pendle and Burnley Electoral Registers.

The new Parliamentary Session will run for eighteen months and I suspect that the Prime Minister will wish to think about an orderly transfer round about this time. There has been talk about a leadership challenge at the Party Conference, but this would be misconceived. I heard the Prime Minister address the first meeting of the new PLP, where some colleagues spoke very bluntly indeed, but he indicated he wanted to manage the transition in his own way. And wanted space to do this.

As it is, we have a Session packed with over forty Bills including the EU Referendum Bill, the Incapacity Benefit Bill, the Incitement to Religious Hatred Bill and, of course, the ID Cards Bill. I have been broadly supportive of this Bill but, clearly, it only makes sense to go ahead if the technology is fraud proof. I was concerned to read that iris scans were only accurate in 93% of cases, with thumb prints and facial measurements even less accurate. A combination of all three lifts accuracy, but not to 99.999% - which is what we are after.

The only thing that could do this is, I suppose, DNA. There were reports that black people and those over 60 had less accurate iris scans and that the scanners used in the 10,000 person pilot study couldn't read properly those with fat fingers! Why are we doing this? Identity fraud costs the nation £1.3 billion a year, but leaving aside the set-up costs, the ID database would cost about £500 million a year to service. So it has to work. The proposal is that ID cards would not be compulsory initially, but the intention would be to make them so. The Bill has now been published and there will be an early vote.

Unusually, all eyes are on France this weekend, where they vote on the proposed EU Constitution. Holland is also having a referendum. The pollsters tell us that the French will vote no, in which case it does pose a question over our commitment to ratify something which is already dead in the water. The new EU Constitution to be implemented requires a yes vote in each of the 25 member States.

The Party's position is that the Constitutional Treaty is good for Britain and Europe. It is designed to make the enlarged Europe work more effectively and bring the various existing Treaties into one. The Treaty maintains Britain's national veto in key areas like taxation, foreign policy, defence and social security. And it replaces the six month rotating presidency (the UK is about to assume this) with a full time President of the Council, enabling the Council of Ministers, representing all the individual governments, to set the agenda. Individual parliaments will also be involved to a greater extent than at present in considering EU legislative proposals.

That is the positive view, but there is another take on the Treaty. And this is why the No Campaign resonates. There is a view that the new Treaty will allow much greater liberalisation of public services such as the post office and that more sectors will be opened up to private competition. Here in the UK, Europe is the dog that didn't bark in the General Election and I feel there is an obligation on the Government to launch a major campaign of public education. Without this, there is no prospect of the Constitution being ratified here.

I want to take this opportunity, again, of thanking everyone who got involved in the Election campaign. I would never have been returned to Westminster without the hard work of many Party members - not just here in Pendle, but in Cheadle and elsewhere, who did so much telephone work. We also had help from the League Against Cruel Sports people and valuable financial help from the Co-op, Unions and, indeed, individuals. We can, of course, learn from this Election and prepare ourselves for the coming Pendle Council local elections. We have an inviting Lib Dem target there and they need to be exposed for what they are. It is tragic that Dorothy and Colin lost their County seats and I hope they will be back. It was good to see Tim re-elected and our thanks go to Sheila, Tony and Frank.

We now face new challenges and one of these must be to build the Pendle Party. ~~New~~ ^{Old} members are coming back and I welcome them, but we must reach out to a new generation.

Tony Prentice
GORDON PRENTICE MP
27.5.05

GC REPORT JANUARY 2005

The United Reformed Church in Brunswick Street was bursting at the seams this afternoon for the funeral of Don Proud. Don was a man of many parts including, of course, his deep involvement in local politics over many years. He was an expert in the Lancashire dialect and I recall listening to him with amazement as he spoke in (to me) a barely recognisable tongue. We shall miss him.

This week has been dominated by the 60th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. And at Westminster Hall yesterday many of the survivors and their families commemorated the event in the presence of the Queen and the Party Leaders. I was in Strasbourg during the earlier part of the week at a meeting of the Council of Europe - and organisation which acts as a human rights watchdog. There was a very moving ceremony on Tuesday where a French man from Strasbourg told of his forced march in freezing temperatures from a death camp in the East, where the Russians were advancing, to a camp further west. You could have heard a pin drop. The President of the Assembly, a Dutch man, Van der Linden, spent 10 minutes in his speech describing a photograph he had seen in the Holocaust Museum in New York. People had tears in the eyes as they listened.

As it happens, I was at Colne Park High School last Friday giving a talk about my work as an MP and then fielding questions. I was asked about Prince Harry wearing the swastika at a fancy dress party and I told the young people that his expensive Eton education should have taught him something about the abyss the Nazis took occupied Europe into. I talked about 6 million deaths, but I should have talked about 6 million faces and 6 million names.

Last week I also went round town with the police and fire brigade looking at the abandoned cars which are dumped all over the place. I knew there was a problem, but I was unaware of its scale. I hadn't realised that there is no car pound here in Pendle where these abandoned cars can be taken and there are also legal difficulties about removing abandoned cars which have been left on private property. Fortunately, a Bill before the Commons - The Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Bill - will give local authorities important new powers to deal with the problem and also with those people who use the street as a garage to repair cars.

I also visited the Blackburn HQ of Groundwork in my capacity as President of the Business Environment Association! This has some bearing on the current long running saga involvement air pollution in North Valley Road caused by the Macadams paint spraying operation. I spoke to Doug Macadam a few days ago at his request and he was scathing about the Lib Dem council. There are a lot of people out there who are scathing about him.

I shall be meeting David Taylor and Max Steinberg from Elevate shortly as I think we all need an up date on Elevate's plans. I see in the Colne Times today that Tony Greaves is apparently saying that Waterside could be heading for ruin if Elevate refuses to come up with regeneration cash.

Is this the same Tony Greaves who was scathing about Elevate in his comments to the local press only a few months ago? And, talking of his Lordship, further splits in the Lib Dem ranks are being exposed for all to see in today's local papers. The Liberata Scheme has been savaged by Tony Greaves as a sell off of council jobs. I shall be interested to hear what Frank has to say about this.

We now know that the Liberal Democrats are to select their Parliamentary candidate for Pendle next Friday. My spies tell me there are three in the running, someone from Cleethorpes, another from London and a local solicitor who is the brother-in-law of Sajid Karim, the Lib Dem MEP. We also know that the BNP is fielding Tom Boocock, who has previously stood for the council in Boulsworth.

There is now very little doubt that the Election will be held on 5 May and the Party is gearing itself up. Andy Smith is now hard at work helping us with publications and much else besides and local delivery teams are doing the business. We do need urgently to rope in more volunteers as there is much to be done.

The forthcoming Public Meeting with Robin Cook on 10 February will, I think, give us some useful publicity and we must keep our fingers crossed that the elections this weekend in Iraq will lead to stability there. We want to get our troops back just as soon as practicable.

Unfortunately, some Government announcements shoot the Party in the foot. The Government is intent on pressing ahead with reforms to Local Government Pension Schemes extending the retirement age from 60 to 65. Workers in the NHS are also affected. Next Wednesday we shall be debating the Local Government Finance Report which hits East Lancashire councils, including Pendle, fairly hard. The over all increase in Government grant to councils is £3.5 billion or 6.2% This is a real terms increase of 3.7% but money due to small district councils has been held back unfairly. We also have had the Home Secretary's announcement this week saying legislation would be introduced to allow for control orders allowing house arrest for those people who cannot be brought to trial because there is no evidence which a court would accept - against them. If needs be, we should be changing the rules on admissibility of evidence rather than doing this.

Next week we deal with Constitutional Affairs and the creation of the new Supreme Court.

I want to close by thanking everyone involved in setting up this year's Silverman Lecture, which went very well with Peter Pike stepping in at the last moment to give an rousing and wide ranging speech.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
28.1.05

Elmwood Hosp Trust / 5.5m deficit - bed. gong. 100,000
No C&A for a year
Whitefield Inquiry by design - Health impact of living
in poor housing
90,000

GC REPORT 26 NOVEMBER 2004

Constitutional reform
Bill - New Supreme Court
and devolution in
Wales, Scotland
& Northern Ireland

The Queen's Speech this week sets out the legislative programme for what everyone expects to be the last Session of Parliament before the General Election. We must plan for May 2005 and hope that Iraq does not go pear shaped. The Identity Cards Bill has captured the headlines and this is bound to be controversial. Although I, personally, support it. An ID that gives conclusive proof of identity with biometric data is needed, but it should not carry other personal information. In total, there are 37 Bills before Parliament, including a number in draft. A few which were presented in the Session just ended are coming up again under the new "carry over" procedure. In this category comes the Gambling Bill which received a baptism of fire earlier this month, with its proposals for regional casinos with unlimited pay-outs. The Government has rapidly back pedalled on that one.

We will also see the creation of a Serious Organised Crime Agency which will tackle things such as people trafficking and drugs. A new Drugs Bill will allow the police to test people when arrested rather than charged. In draft there will be a Corporate Manslaughter Bill which will hold top management to account where serious failings result in the death of an employee. An Inquiries Bill will look at the way Inquiries are run and organised. We have had a spate of high profile Inquiries - Butler, Hutton and the infamous Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday, which has taken six years and cost £150 million.

Yet another Education Bill promises school inspections that are "shorter and sharper" and gives less notice to schools. The important Consumer Credit Bill will curb exploitative deals and loan sharks. We have seen in the press how modest loans have ballooned into crippling financial burdens for the unwary.

The European Union Bill will ratify the EU Constitution subject to a Referendum. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill will give important new powers to local authorities to issue fines for litter, graffiti and so on. There will be new powers relating to abandoned vehicles, fly tipping, noise and light pollution. And we now have an new Housing Act on the Statute Book which will allow councils like Pendle to licence private landlords.

The Queen's Speech has plenty of meat on it and there will be important dividing lines between us and the Lib Dems. As you know, the Liberal Democrats present a big threat to us here in Pendle, by creaming off soft Labour support. We need to go in hard and let people know the Lib Dems are really a franchise operation, with a national logo, but with policies decided nationally, or locally, whatever fits.

The Lib Dems voted against Anti Social Behaviour Orders and will be campaigning against identity cards. They have promised to axe baby bonds (the £250 that goes into an account for each newly born child) and the New Deal. They even called last year's increase in the National Minimum Wage "dangerous". They opposed free TV licences for the over 75s and the Winter Fuel Allowance and they say they will scrap the Pension Credit. They promise instead an big hike in the pension. We will show their sums simply don't add up and that they have promised billions of pounds of unaffordable commitments.

North Cotes voted in 10

Charles Town & Ford
2,000 to 1,500 people there

Nationally, the Lib Dems are in favour of the European Constitution and the Euro but these would not be supported by Mr. Pendle, who confesses in his column to being a Liberal voter. I am putting together a policy checklist showing where the Lib Dems nationally and locally diverge. If you spot any useable quotes, let me know.

who decided?

The council is about to embark on a consultation over the council housing stock transfer. I believe that Pendle should hang on to its own housing stock which is in pretty good repair and we need to take a strategic decision on whether or not to oppose this.

Locally, Housing Market Renewal still dominates the headlines and I went along to the exhibition in the Civic Theatre in Stanley Street, which set out the proposals for Nelson. Leaflets there told visitors that there are over 1000 empty houses in Nelson; 24% of properties are "unfit"; 43% of the private sector homes are "unfit"; it would cost £24 million to make these unfit dwellings fit and carry out immediate repairs and that a further 20% of dwellings are in "substantial disrepair". How we tackle this issue could make or break us. We should be saying (truthfully) that the Labour Government is giving East Lancashire the first real opportunity in a generation turn the area around.

On Monday of this week I also looked in on the Prince's Foundation "Inquiry by Design" which has been taking place all week. The final session is tonight at the Silverman Hall and we wait to see what comes out of it. Certainly, expectations have been raised and I noticed in the press that group repairs in the St. Mary's conservation area of Whitefield are coming in at £34,000 per property - perhaps more than the property itself is worth even after being done up.

I have been working with the Regional Organiser, Andy Smith, who will be joining us at Carr Road for at least two days a week from January onwards. This gives us a huge advantage and we are lucky to have him. I have drafted a letter to go to 5,000 Labour or former Labour voters, together with a survey form and all we have to do is deliver it, given that the Party regionally will do the printing. I hope we will all make an effort because none of us wants to wake up the day after the General Election telling ourselves we should and could have done a little bit more.

As it is, Pendle is in the firing line. Although the Lib Dems have not yet selected their candidate, they will want to do well here. For their part, the Conservatives will be working hard to get their core vote out. And the hunting fraternity are pledged to get rid of me at all costs. I hope they do not mean this literally, but the police are checking out security at Carr Road and at my home!

After seven years in Government we have made some mistakes and there are some people out there who wouldn't vote Labour if we paid them. But on many of the things that really matter to people - jobs, health, the spending in our schools - we have a good story to tell. And we should tell it.

GORDON PRENTICE MP

26.11.04

Agvt of Offenders Bill
No Cat A escapes under Labour
13 in 3 years 93-96!

interesting fact.

// Done lunch diff
 - Chair Health School Can
 in the new year.

- Done Book let
 character -
 - Done 1 hand
 6 numbers young people
 13x 500 Action

REPORT TO GC OCTOBER 2004

It has been an eventful week at Westminster. I had a meeting with the

It has been an eventful week at Westminster. I had a question to the Prime Minister on Wednesday about how we can best renew ourselves in Government which was variously interpreted as an attack on the Prime Minister or the casual dismissal of our achievements in office. It was neither. *- Had a certain ambivalence*

THROWING THE DICE

The real concern focuses on the proposed regional casinos of which there will be perhaps 40. Depending on their distribution across the country, it could mean that these mega casinos are within 20 minutes of 80% of the population. They could have up to 1,250 slot machines with unlimited pay-outs. I have backed a Commons motion tabled by Frank Field proposing these should be piloted in one or two areas, so we can then understand what we are dealing with. I am told that the Government is ready to listen and we shall see what happens on Monday.

On Tuesday of next week the Children's Bill comes back to the Commons and here the issue is whether it should be lawful for children to be smacked. An amendment to Clause 56 will be tabled by my colleague David Hinchcliffe MP to remove completely the defence of "reasonable chastisement" and to ban smacking completely. A number of colleagues have been pressing for a free vote. I would be happy to have a free vote and would support the Government's position which says a total ban would be unworkable.

On Tuesday we also have the American elections and we all wait for the result of this nail biting contest. A Kerry Presidency would certainly bring changes with it, not least in foreign policy. It would, of course, be quite bizarre for the result to turn on the voting in Florida, where suggestions of malpractice are rife.

Local examples - Alan Whitaker.
details of what's happening in schools. Narden
Primary School - in Sports Hall.

- Cooperside issue - David Whipp (Campaigning skills)
Sponsored in 2007

- 24 hour staff; smoke alarms, licensed by magistrates after
inspection by Fire Brigade.

CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Back here, we have a debate on Defence Procurement, which is not something that people
ordinarily get exercised about. However, over recent months I have been approached by local
firms who have lost contracts with the MOD and believe they are not being treated fairly.
The latest case involves a contract which went to a Northern Ireland firm making lingerie.
The order was for army field jackets and it transpires that these are to be made in China. The
firm is outside Pendle and I am working with other Lancashire colleagues to try and get some
sense into the MOD's procurement policy.

HOUSING

Housing is never far from the headlines and I see that the Borough Council is looking to
transfer its housing stock to a social landlord. I have big reservations about this and will be
interested to hear where things stand. The Housing Renewal Pathfinder controversy rumbles
on with Tony Greaves telling the local press today that he was "genuinely sorry if his
previous comments on the Housing Market Renewal Project (Elevate) caused any confusion".
I suppose that's a start, but he goes on to suggest in his latest letter that 9,000 houses could
be demolished in East Lancashire. The estimated demolition figure for the whole of East
Lancashire up to March 2006 is 600. We desperately need to get some balance back into the
housing renewal debate and I hope that the County Council could use an edition of its free
newspaper "Vision" to focus on what we are trying to do to renew housing in this area.

PREPARING FOR A MAY ELECTION

The General Election may well be held in May next year and it is all hands to the pump! I
had a very useful meeting with Andy Smith this afternoon and he will be doing a presentation
this evening. He is also offering a significant amount of time to help us here in Pendle in
the General Election. This is a marvellous offer which I am sure we will take up.

I mentioned at the Campaign Committee last week that I had discovered a very useful website
(www.financialcalculus.co.uk) which predicts the election outcome for every constituency in
Britain based upon national opinion polls. It's ok as far as it goes, as it assumes a uniform
national swing and there will be, I am sure, significant regional variations. We also do not
know how many parties will be standing - UKIP probably, BNP possibly, Respect, possibly
as well as the Tories and Lib. Dems.

As you know, MPs and Peers expenses were published last week and can be accessed on the
Parliamentary website (www.parliament.uk). The average claim of a Lib Dem MP is that of
a Labour MP, but since they very often represent far flung constituencies I do not draw any
conclusions from that. It illustrates the perils of making assumptions.

GORDON PRENTICE MP

29.10.04

27 years to get full pension at 65!

Hunting Bill - now in House of Lords - PM wants
compromise.

Forced Marriage - criminal offence.

BBO Parker + K66 7217!

election
register - as of.

Blum

Report to GC on Friday 27 August 2004

Today, the Electoral Commission published its review of the postal voting in the local and European elections on 10 June. It has concluded that, in future, all-postal voting should not be used in UK elections. The Commission nevertheless says it is too late to do anything about the all postal voting due on 4 November in the referendum on whether the North East wants a Regional Assembly. The Report will no doubt be debated at Westminster next month.

No referendum
deception
local govt
reform
from beyond
boundary
Rankin

The writ for the by election in Hartlepool will be moved when Parliament returns in September. This will undoubtedly be a difficult election for us despite the Party's 15,000 majority. UKIP will undoubtedly run a high profile campaign but their attack has been blunted somewhat by Kilroy's decision not to stand.

No Pendle
very anti EU

September will see the end of one of the longest running dramas in British political history - whether the Labour Government will finally move to ban hunting with dogs. Five years after the Prime Minister said it would be banned, it is still there, alive and well. For the parliament Act to be used (and to over-ride any veto by the Lords) the Bill has to be brought back to the Commons next month. My colleagues are all confident the Bill will be reintroduced but I am still wary!

All eyes are now focussed on the forthcoming General Election which will be difficult for us. At last week's Campaign Committee I suggested inviting Robin Cook to come to Pendle for this year's Silverman Lecture and I have now written to him. The dates will have to be flexible as he is in great demand but I keep my fingers crossed.

Robert Oliver has also agreed to be my General Election Agent. I am very fortunate indeed to have Robert take on this task. He knows the internal wiring of the Pendle Labour Party and will do a great job!

Robert

Compensation
affordability

Locally, I have been dropping in to local organisations and showing my face. I discovered earlier this week when I visited the new Christ Church HQ of the Nelson Credit Union that I am Member 555! A great relief that I am not 666!

I have also spoken to Brian Holmes and his colleagues at the Pendle Community Network. Yesterday, I met Tony Greaves, David Whipp and John David (plus Chief Executive) for a general chat about things and we agreed I should meet them every three months. They wanted to talk about the Council's financial position and the results of the new Deprivation Index which sees Pendle dropping zillions of places. Also on the agenda were Post Office closures and the Elevate programme.

pop
5,000
night!

Council
and Lib Dem
need to work
together

This was my first meeting with the Lib Dem leadership. They have a very clear agenda - which includes setting me up! Or trying to!

post watch
postmaster in power
Nelson
closures
No more
closures

Housing renewal is certainly a key area and the Lib Dems are positioning themselves as the champions of "the community" - resisting the demolition of homes which could be better renovated. I asked them if the Council's position was "no demolition". Silence and then a "no". We need a discussion within the Party on how we handle the Elevate proposals. We need to be on the front foot and not the back.

Yes they
want
Breckfield to
go ahead

I shall be meeting the Chief Executive of Elevate, Max Steinberg, on 10 September and there will clearly be lots to discuss. The Elevate programme

See this
letter - resources will be transferred to other areas
compensation

envisages the demolition of 790 homes and we need to be clear about the criteria used for selecting these. Over 1,100 homes are to be refurbished, repaired or improved and 131 new homes are to be built. Over 73,000 homes will be subject to "additional management measures" designed to overcome low demand.

Next week, I shall be opening the new extension at Coates Lane Primary in Barnoldswick.

I shall also be joining the SELRAP people in walking along the old railway track bed from Earby to Colne on 5 September. I understand the Council's position has now changed and the Lib Dems want to see the trackbed protected. However, their support for a re-opened railway seems to be very lukewarm indeed.

Finally, on 19 September I shall be joining the Access to Boulsworth campaigners in a walk to the magnificent outcrop of rocks – the Alcomden Stones – where a short ceremony will take place at 3pm. 19 September is the day when the public has full, legal access rights to land in the so called lower North West which was previously out of bounds.

It has taken a long time to get here. I have the front page of the Lancashire Evening Telegraph, dated 9 March 1999, hanging in my office. It declares how I forced a U turn in Government policy on access to land!

Gordon Prentice MP

27 August 2004.

REPORT TO GC - MARCH 2004

The death of Amy Spence came as a great shock to us all and I was present at the funeral today, along with the Mayor and many comrades. For many years Amy helped in my office at Carr Road, but she spent a lifetime working for the Party. It will be very hard for Ken and we shall all miss her.

BUDGET

Down at Westminster the big news of the month was, of course, the Budget. It was Gordon Brown's eighth Budget and, generally speaking, went down well. We have the lowest inflation for 30 years, the lowest interest rates for 40 years and more people in work than at any time in the Nation's history. When people complain about our record I gently remind them of the mortgage rates at 15% and the repossessions which took place on a monthly basis at Nelson County Court. Now we have a stable economy and rising prosperity for most people. The Budget makes a £100 payment for pensioner households with someone aged 70 or over to help with their Council Tax bills. And the minimum wage is going up to £4.85 for adults and £4.10 for young people from October 2004. The child element of the Child Tax Credit increases by £3.50 a week from next month.

The Chancellor also referred to cuts in Civil Service jobs. His reference to 40,000 was, I think, a mistake and he mentioned it purely to wrong foot the Conservatives and to underline the point that he was transferring resources from the back office to the shop front. Unfortunately, the Civil Service Unions are not taking this lying down and here in Pendle we have the prospect of Civil Servants employed at the File Store in Brunswick Street being transferred (on existing terms and conditions) to Capita as from 1 July. I know that many people working there are deeply unhappy at this prospect.

ALL POSTAL VOTING?

The Elections on 10 June creep up on us and yet we are still uncertain if there is to be all postal voting here in the North West. We have seen the most astonishing battle of wills between the House of Lords and the Commons on whether all postal voting should be allowed in four regions of England or three, or two! The Electoral Commission has quite specifically said that all postal pilots should not take place in four regions and this gives succour to the Lords. The Government is holding firm, insisting that all postal voting takes place in four regions and we shall be debating this in the Commons again - for the fourth time - on Monday. This ping pong can continue indefinitely, although the constitutional convention is for the Lords to back down and give way to the elected House. We shall see.

Next week also sees the return to the Chamber of the Higher Education Bill which has been in Committee for the past month or so. As you know, the Bill was given a Second Reading with a majority of only five votes. I shared the reservations of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire, Malcolm McVicar, who believes that the introduction of variable fees will, over time, produce a multi-tiered university system with an Ivy League at the top. The Government insists that variability lies at the heart of the Bill and no concessions were made at the Committee stage. A number of my colleagues have tabled an amendment which would take variability out of the Bill and this will undoubtedly be put to the vote. All the Opposition Parties will be voting against the Government next Wednesday.

1 Day - 10 new statutes - New arrangements needed to make sure it all works. proposes EU President + Ministers.

tax policy
foreign policy
criminal justice

17 Time
On Monday the Prime Minister will be reporting back to the Commons on the European Council Meeting in Brussels earlier this week. The focus is on counter-terrorism measures at the EU level in the wake of the Madrid bombings. There is also the renewed prospect of an agreement by the end of June on a new Constitutional Treaty for the EU. We could have done without this, as it is a very divisive issue. The Government has resisted calls for a referendum, but there are many who believe the new Treaty should be put to the electorate for ratification.

Spanish hybrid to reduction in voting rights.

any other MEPs? /
concern this?

Nearer to home, we had the announcement today in Blackburn by John Prescott of the resources going to the Housing Renewal Pathfinder - Elevate. £68 million is going to Elevate over the next two years for implementing its scheme up to the end of March 2006. But additional sums from other Agencies will boost the resources available to over £100 million. Here in East Lancashire, this means the demolition of almost 800 houses, the refurbishment of over 1100 homes and the building of 100 new ones and "significant improvements to housing environments affecting 43,000 homes and additional management measures to over 73,000 homes."

The bullet points below have been put together by my colleague Nigel Griffiths MP and are a useful reminder of some of the things we have done.

OUR FOUNDATIONS

- Highest number of people in work in UK history.
- Lowest inflation for 30 years.
- Lowest interest rates for 40 years.
- Fastest growing economy in the G7, alongside the USA.
- Lowest unemployment for a generation.
- Longest period of sustained growth for 200 years.
- Lowest borrowing of any G7 economy, cutting net Government borrowing to 3.4% - vs 8% under the Tories.
- Slashed debt to 33% of GDP - vs 44% under the Tories.
- Lowest debt interest payments since 1915: 2% of GDP.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

- OAP households over 70 get an extra £100 on top of the £200 winter fuel payment. The over-80s get £400 in total.
- Labour slashed VAT on fuel, abolished eye test charges, introduced £200 & £300 Winter Fuel payments and provides free TV licences for the over-75s.
- First ever *National Minimum Wage* for 16 & 17 year-olds.
- Increased the adult rate by twice the rate of inflation - up 8% to £4.85p a hour - benefiting 1.6 million workers.
- Manufacturing output rose in each of the last four quarters.
- 'Green' fuel tax cut by 20% to support bioethanol fuel.
- Labour gave 12.5% exemption from VAT on church repairs - extended in this Budget to 17.5%. (if used by other parishes)
- *New Deal for Skills* to guarantee Level Two attainment.
- Slashed British deficit to less than £40bn - 2nd times lower than the Tory deficit.
- 40,000 fewer civil servants by 2007/8 - to focus resources on front-line services. Another 20,000 moved to the regions.

10 years ago, 75% of extra government spending was lost on debt interest, leaving only 25% for our public services. Now 75% is invested in our services.

OUR INVESTMENTS

Building our NHS

- 40 new hospitals now open - 74 more under construction.
- £40 billion more for investment in the NHS by 2007/8 - a 7.2% rise every year - well over twice the rate of inflation.
- £1.2 billion to be spent on NHS research by 2007/8.

Strengthening our State Education

- £8.5 billion extra investment in education over 3 years.
- Increasing Education budget from £59 billion this year to £77 billion by 2007/8.
- Only 4.7% GDP in '97 to 5.6% by 2008 - from amongst the lowest in the developing world - to amongst the best.
- Spending per pupil has risen from £2,500 per pupil to £4,500 now and £5,500 by 2007/8 - Labour is doubling spending.
- £180,000 extra to every secondary school and £55,000 for every primary school.
- £669 million to tackle child poverty through *Early Education*, *Surestart* and *Childcare* - a 17% annual increase.
- £22 million match funding for the *Commonwealth Education Fund* to help eradicate illiteracy in developing countries.
- 164,000 more pupils attaining the Maths and English standard every year through Labour's *Numeracy and Literacy hours*.

We have targeted the poorest families who are now £3,000 a year better off in real terms. In fact, all families with children are on average £1,350 a year better off in real terms.

Adrian Pringle MP
26-3-04

Building Schools for the Future *Autumn* *Summit Headley*
 Cabinet Secy *the Early Years Centre*
 BSC Charter Review - *Ing. Hutton* *Dec* *Walter Lunn Nursery*
Kitty Usher *③ Yesspers*
Wharf.

REPORT TO AGM : MARCH 2004

It is almost a year since the House of Commons voted to go to war against Iraq. And although the war was quickly won, building a stable Iraq has proved more difficult. Iraq is the issue that will not go away. *Mansfield* *Edge Gnd.* *- Dec 21 coming up shortly*

I was at the PLP meeting on Wednesday when a number of colleagues rounded on Claire Short for her remarks about the bugging of Kofi Annan. There was a sense of frustration that Claire's determination to bring down the Prime Minister was affecting her judgement. It is certainly getting very personal. Alongside this, other related issues have risen to prominence. With the continued absence of any weapons of mass destruction, attention has re-focused on the legal advice which was given to the Government by the Attorney General. A summary has been published, but there are growing demands for the full opinion to be disclosed. We wait to see how things unfold.

CRYING WOLFF!

The Government is also running into difficulties over its constitutional reforms, with the Lord Chief Justice coming dangerously close to calling for a written Constitution. There is disquiet about the proposed Supreme Court and the abolition of the post of Lord Chancellor. Although I do not have any problems with these policies, I am also very much in favour of a Judicial Appointments Commission. The problem has arisen more in the way in which the policies were developed and announced, rather than their intrinsic merit.

On a related theme, the Government's proposals for Lords' reform have run into difficulties and the publication of the Bill has been postponed. The Bill as drafted would have allowed an elected element for the Second Chamber and, since this is not Government policy, the Bill has had to be re-drafted. It is not clear, in any event, whether this Bill will get through the Lords as the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are pledged to oppose it. They say they want a coherent package of reforms and not simply a Bill to get rid of the remaining 92 hereditaries. We await with interest the new People's Peers and the new Patronage Peers whose names are to be announced shortly.

HUNTING

On Monday, I had dinner with Animal Welfare organisations such as the RSPCA, who have been pressing for the re-introduction of the Hunting Bill. And I am hopeful that it will be re-introduced before the summer recess. This is the last realistic date for the Bill to be brought back and for the Parliament Act to be used if the Lords try to block it.

We have discussed the Elevate Prospectus before, and I am told that John Prescott will make an announcement shortly on the funding for the Housing Pathfinders in England. Clearly, a lot rides on this and we have got to be seen to be tackling the appalling housing problems in this area. Pendle has the third highest percentage of terraced housing in the country at 58.6% and much of it is run down, empty or abandoned.

— Jane Ellison - Selwyn City *— 112*
Sedlitz Robinson *at Oakes Hotel* *Sighting*

CENSUS REVELATIONS

As it happens, the detailed results of the 2001 Census show Pendle again at third place in the manufacturing stakes. Manufacturing constitutes 30.3% of employment, although this is way down on the figure when I first became MP here. We have seen huge restructuring while reducing unemployment to an historically low level. Our record on creating jobs has been a solid achievement.

I had to pass up the chance of turning the first sod of the new Health Centre at Yardspinnners Wharf. I had to be in the Commons for my Referendum (Threshold) Bill which produced a lively debate. In my place, PCT Chairman, Jim Heyes did the ceremonial stuff.

Despite all the difficulties we have faced this past year and the buffeting the Government is taking at present, our eyes have to be fixed on the forthcoming elections on 10 June. I hope that the Budget which is coming up on 17 March will provide a springboard for the campaign. The Conservatives are all over the place and I am sure their proposals will fall apart under scrutiny. The Liberal Democrats are also in the process of re-packaging themselves and could present a problem for us in East Lancashire. We still do not know how the BNP will fare, although we welcome their recent reverses in Burnley.

As you know, Peter Pike's successor has been chosen by the Burnley CLP and I have written to Kitty Usher to congratulate her and to offer her my help and support.

DRESSED FOR THE PART

I think this is a first for me to deliver my AGM Report wearing a dinner suit and bow tie! I may do this in future and I expect everyone else in attendance to do the same (ladies in ball gowns).

I want to congratulate Iqbal for the splendid job he has done as Mayor (although its not over until the fat lady sings). Iqbal has never been out of the local papers. Can I also thank the small number of colleagues who, year in year out, keep the Party afloat and functioning. They are the true heroes.

This year will undoubtedly be testing, but for all our present difficulties, the Government is still ahead in the polls - and this is in a difficult mid-term in our second Government. With the right policies, a third term is well within our grasp.

GORDON PRENTICE MP

5.3.04

REPORT TO GC JANUARY 2004

This has been a momentous week at Westminster with the Government scraping through on its controversial policy on variable tuition fees. Its majority collapsed from 161 to 5. I was one of over 70 Labour MPs who could not support the Government. Many of my colleagues abstained. Although concessions were offered (and many arms were twisted) the core element of the Bill remained unchanged. The introduction of variable tuition fees would, in my view, bring in a market in higher education, with the development over time of an Ivy League group of universities charging what the market will bear.

TUITION FEES

One of the concessions made was to cap tuition fees to £3,000 for the next 5 years. But then what? At some stage the cap will be lifted. Many Vice Chancellors were hostile to the proposals - including Malcolm McVicar, the VC of the University of Central Lancashire. Others opposed to the Bill included the Association of University Teachers, NAFHE, the NUS and Socialist Education Association. There was the additional difficulty of the Manifesto commitment not to raise top-up fees and, like foundation hospitals, the policy was never discussed or agreed by the National Policy Forum. Now that the Prime Minister has said there will be more discussion and dialogue I hope we are going to have a debate about GM crops before being told we are getting them. Yesterday he ruled out "co-payment" as one way of financing public services. Rumours had been circulating that hotel charges would be levied on people in NHS hospitals!

HUTTON

The other big issue to dominate the headlines is, of course, the Hutton Report. His conclusions have triggered a crisis in the BBC which now admits an error in backing Gilligan. I hope the Government doesn't push the BBC too hard as, despite its failings, public trust in the BBC is an enduring constant. We have a debate coming up on the Report on Wednesday and I shall be trying to catch the Speaker's eye. The big unanswered question concerns the whereabouts of the Weapons of Mass Destruction and the genesis of the 45 minute claim. The Head of the Iraq survey group, David Kay, now says it is unlikely WMDs will be found and at some state the Government will have to confront this uncomfortable truth.

As it happens, the Select Committee on which I serve is to quiz Lord Hutton - probably in April. We are having an inquiry into inquiries! It will be fascinating stuff. We are also in the middle of an inquiry into the Honours System and I shall be pressing for a radical review, stripping away these class based divisions of commanders, officers and members and substituting an Order of Britain or some such. On the same theme, we can expect the next batch of People's Peers in the next fortnight. The first and only batch to date of 15 was announced almost 3 years ago to hoots of derision. Watch this space. The Government is still trying to find a way forward on House of Lords reform but that looks as if it is running into the sand.

- Taiter fees - Blair will be doing.
- Hulton BBC power point

Locally, we can expect news in mid February of the "Building Schools for the Future" bid which will replace all existing Burnley secondary schools with new ones and, hopefully, will give us two new schools in Pendle.

We have also had the prospectus from Elevate setting out its plans to tackle the collapse in the housing market in parts of East Lancashire. I have written to John Prescott, along with my East Lancashire colleagues, fully supporting the bid and I keep my fingers crossed.

£27m
to
Pendle.

We also have the Regional Assembly Referendums coming up in October and I shall be arguing for a threshold of 50% turnout for the result to carry. The Bill comes up on 27 February, but I am afraid I cannot expect Government support. The deadline for the response to the Boundary Committee's consultation on the shape of local government in this area falls on 23 February. I haven't met many people who are enthusiastic for subsuming Pendle into a Burpendale, but we wait to see how the debate unfolds.

NEW CONSERVATIVE FACE

The Conservatives here in Pendle have unceremoniously dumped Rasjid Skinner for a Jane Ellison. She fought the Tottenham by-election a few years ago and didn't really appear on the radar scheme. She has also fought Barnsley twice and, again, registered very little support. I understand she is from Halifax, but has spent quite a bit of time in Barnet in north London. I have done a data base search on her to find out her views on the kind of issues that people here would be interested in. I cite, Kashmir, low pay, manufacturing as examples of my thinking. Sadly, I have drawn a blank, but no doubt she will start appearing in the local papers expressing her views in due course.

Today I visited Farmhouse Biscuits and came away with a biscuit barrel full of scrummy biscuits! These are guarded in the office by Helen, but if you ask nicely you may get one. However, there is a serious point which involves the EU sugar regime. Payments are made to food producers to compensate them for the difference between the EU price and the world price which is lower. However, the red tape is daunting and I have fixed up a meeting with the Minister on Monday with the Farmhouse Biscuits people to try and sort something out.

LEN DOLE

I end on a sad note. I was at Len Dole's funeral on Monday and saw him off to the strains of the Red Flag and Give Peace a Chance. Doug Hoyle gave a splendid valediction and Len's son and granddaughter contributed. As I told the Nelson Leader, I last saw Len on the day before he died and after chatting to him for about twenty minutes, I got up to leave. He lifted his hand and took mine and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Gordon Prentice MP
30.1.04

2500
washed 'yes'

Health

REPORT TO GC NOVEMBER 2003

On Wednesday we had the Queen's Speech, setting out the programme for the new Parliamentary Session. It makes for a very busy year ahead with about 25 Bills and eight others in draft form. There is no mention of the Hunting Bill being reintroduced in this Session, although we are told there is a clear commitment to introduce it.

The most controversial Bill will be the one dealing with top-up fees, where over 100 Labour MPs have signed a Commons motion calling for proper consideration of all the options. This Bill has become a trial of strength between the Party leadership and many of its MPs. This proposal was specifically ruled out in the 2001 Manifesto.

We are also returning to the issue of Asylum & Immigration with yet another Bill to reform the appeals system, reducing opportunities to lodge multiple appeals to delay removal from the UK. There will also be a Domestic Violence Bill which will give the police significant new powers to deal with domestic violence (last week I visited the Victim Support Unit at Burnley Magistrates Court and saw the steps that are taken to protect women from violent partners when cases come up before the court).

A new Children's Bill will appoint a Children's Commissioner, an independent person to champion children's views. The Bill will also ensure that in the short to medium term every council has two people (one official and one at political level) who are responsible for services to children.

A Fire & Rescue Services Bill will recast the Fire Service and give default powers to the Minister to establish new negotiating bodies to determine conditions of service should current arrangements fail. This is a fall-out from the Firefighter's Strike. A new Child Trust Fund Bill will provide a nest egg at birth for every child. There will be an initial endowment of £250 for all children, rising to £500 for the poorest third of children. And an Identity Cards Bill will be published in draft to allow further debate on this controversial issue.

A Pensions Bill will introduce a new pension protection fund which will end the scandal of workers being denied pensions they have built up over many years and, for the first time, guaranteeing a pension if a company goes bust. A new Civil Partnerships Bill will give same sex couples many of the same rights of married couples.

At long last, we have a new Housing Bill which will tackle unscrupulous landlords and reform home buying and selling by introducing a new home information pack. Councils will be given powers to licence private landlords in areas like Pendle where there is low housing demand or where there are serious problems.

A new Traffic Management Bill will be introduced to tackle road congestion. Councils will be able to issue permits giving people who dig up the roads specific dates and times for the work to be carried out. The sight of utility companies constantly digging up and relaying the same patch of road is a constant irritation.

/cont....

David

also of Bill Draft

introduced Lords

John

Lords reform

There will be a number of Bills dealing with constitutional reform. A new Supreme Court will be set up allowing the Law Lords to leave the House of Lords. The post of Lord Chancellor will be abolished and the Lords would elect their own Speaker. The remaining hereditaries would be abolished and a recast House of Lords appointment commission established. The Prime Minister wants to see a wholly appointed House of Lords. How this squares with our Manifesto commitment to establish a more democratic and representative Second Chamber, heaven only knows.

Judicial Appts Commission

QC reform

Other measures, as Her Majesty would say, will be brought before us!

That's for the year ahead, but the Session that has just finished had its dramas. There was an extended ping pong between the Lords and the Commons on the Criminal Justice Bill - restricting jury trials in cases of serious fraud - and Foundation Hospitals, which has now been carried into law despite a big rebellion on the Labour side. Our majority collapsed to 17 - the lowest ever under this Government.

The Party is now embarking on a "conversation with the nation" and CLPs will be receiving "a campaign tool-kit and CD Rom, a big conversation video and survey form". This initiative can - and no doubt will - be read a number of ways. The cynics would say it is pointless window dressing for decisions already taken but others will believe, more charitably, it is a genuine attempt to connect with the public.

The defining issue of this Parliament has, of course, been the war in Iraq. The report from Lord Hutton into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr. David Kelly, will reignite debate of this issue. We are still no nearer finding these weapons of mass destruction which would give some credence at least to the 45 minutes claim. As it happens, I was in Preston earlier today for a briefing from the top brass of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment. The Regiment performed heroically in Basra from June to November this year. The presentation to Lancashire MPs showed the perils of this kind of work, but also the sheer professionalism of the soldiers. We learned from the colonel that the forthcoming defence review in mid December may recommend the reduction in the number of regiments from 40 down to 35 and we all agreed that the QLR should stay as is.

Running with the tank empty 100 + TA

On Monday coming (1 December) the Boundary Commission will publish its draft recommendations for a new local government structure across the North West. This will be big news locally. On 10 December I shall be meeting Max Steinberg from Elevate down at Westminster for an up-date on the bid that is being put into to Government. The hugely significant bid from Lancashire County Council to recast secondary school provision in Burnley and parts of Pendle will be decided by Ministers at the turn of the year.

Finally, the new Tory Leader, Michael Howard is making his mark at the Despatch Box. But whether he morphs into something even remotely loveable outside is doubtful.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
28.11.03

almost in the polls by 2% first time in a decade.

Kew

got rid of 20% up to hosp who members were elected by channels

moving to 10% members from wealth Fiji

splitting hosp by hosp. keeping best practice in own hosp - not sharing